

THIS! is the
Story of Illustration



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THIS! is an exhibition of illustrations — pictures we remember from the books we read when we were young, as well as those we now read with our children. We are nevertheless often hardly even familiar with the illustrators who created them: who would after all go dig for a name written in fine print somewhere with the rest of the book's credits. Thus we often miss out on just how amazing the Slovak tradition of illustration is, and the fact that it every bit as much a work of art as a painting or a graphic. It deserves to be displayed in a gallery.

Please, do come in.



TOTO! je príbeh ilustrácie



TOTO! je výstava, kde sú vystavené ilustrácie — obrázky, ktoré si pamätáme z knižiek, čo sme čítali ako deti, aj z tých, čo si teraz čítame so svojimi deťmi. Ilustrátorov a ilustrátorky, ktorí ich vytvorili, však často ani nepoznáme: veď koho by napadlo hľadať niekde na konci knihy meno napísané drobnými písmenkami. A tak nám často uniká, aká je slovenská ilustrátorská tradícia úžasná. A aj to, že ilustrácia je také isté umelecké dielo ako obraz či grafika. Zaslúži si visieť v galérii.

Nech sa páči, vstúpte.

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4. 5. — 15. 10. 2023

Bratislava City Gallery
Pálffy Palace

TOTO! je
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4. 5. — 15. 10. 2023

Galéria mesta Bratislavy
Pálffyho palác



Organizátori / Organisers

Výstava vzniká v spolupráci TOTO! je galéria
a Galérie mesta Bratislavy. Diela prezentované na výstave
sú zo zbierok TOTO! je galéria a Galérie mesta Bratislavy.



The exhibition is produced in cooperation THIS! is the Gallery
with the Bratislava City Gallery. The works displayed in the
exhibition are from the collections of THIS! is the Gallery
and the Bratislava City Gallery.



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How the collection becomes a treasure



An illustration? You turn your nose up at it and say: “It is just a minor, rather applied art. Paper? Anilines, markers, crayons, pencils?”

Sure, but...

It is a dance in a narrow space.

Dance with strictly given rules on how the book illustrations should look like: whether they should be full-page, half-page, coloured, black-and-white, etc.

It is very tempting to look down on this art genre.

The truth is, however, that book illustrations are often the first work of art we encounter as children. It is through the illustrations accompanying individual stories (true stories or fiction) that we discover the world. We learn how wonderful it is to be eager to discover new things, look for connections, and get to know the logic of things and events. The stories of these paper heroes and heroines even make us think about the values: why we should be good, brave and honest.

While the details of these stories often slip our minds, the images stay there forever.

Therefore it is very surprising that we tend to remember the names of the writers but not so much the names of the illustrators. The fact is that illustrators are not part of the school curriculum, be it literature, art history or history. Yet, it would be interesting to learn “how” (techniques used) the illustrations emerged and in what kind of context! After all, it is possible to track the books which featured the first Slovak illustrations and the publishing houses that published them. At the same time, it is possible to discover how and why the artists, including children’s book illustrators, started experimenting with the form in the 1960s. Which visual artists were not allowed to exhibit their works in the 1970s and found (using the words of Robert Brun) “asylum” in book illustration?

Why, in the 1990s, the book market almost collapsed, and many illustrated books remained unpublished, even though they were nearly finished?

Where are the originals of all those stunning works today?

Before the works of art are presented to the broad public at the gallery they must be collected, classified, and categorised into comprehensible and logical systems. It is widely believed that it is the obligation of state-owned and municipal galleries to acquire all valuable art objects and store them in their depositories.

However, it does not work that way.

Exceptional works of art are often found in private collections.

Only mistrust, lack of respect and pride prevent collection owners from putting their collections together like a puzzle and showing the public a slice of art history, if not the whole picture.

Since as the art historian Eva Trojanová put it: “Art history is topography.” You need to seek and combine not only well-known things, but also unique objects and works created silently in seclusion; you need to get out of the big cities and revive the interest in forgotten artists.

And so we have teamed up.

Bratislava City Gallery and THIS! is the Gallery.

Opening our collections, we want to show you how the Slovak illustration developed, how it changed over time, and who brought it to the highest level.

Now you can walk through the exhibition and think: “Wow! I know that! That’s beautiful! I have read that before! It never occurred to me to examine how it was made! I have read this one, too!”

Jaroslav Vodrážka
Karol Ondreička št.
Fedor Klimáček
Mária Želibská
Rudolf Fabry
Ľubomír Kellenberger



Jaroslav Vodrážka (1894 - 1984)

is one of Slovakia's seminal figures in the field of artistically produced books, including those for children. In the years 1923 – 1939, he worked in Martin, collaborated on the editorial programs of the cultural and educational institution Matica slovenská, cooperated with the Slniečko children's magazine and led courses in typography. In 1945, he resumed his cooperation with Matica slovenská as well as with the Mladé letá publishing house which focused on publishing books for children and young adults. Illustration became the dominant component of his oeuvre. His means of expression were colored drawings with gouache or watercolor, having mostly the character of genre scenes. At their center were often animals with optimistic expressions in humorous situations. He placed them in anthropomorphic environments and dressed them up in standard clothing of the period, making them more approachable to his contemporaries. His characters became popular with and beloved by child readers. Within the worlds of these animals he created small intimate environments which, however, had very human character. This brought them closer to his young audiences and made their existence more homely. The hare had a real house under a tree, complete with furniture, an office, and was wearing human clothes. The animal world functioned as a stand-in for the human world, or rather, the animal characters were implanted in it. The story was in this way made more familiar to the reader and the animal an equal counterpart to a person.

Barbara Brathová

Karol Ondreička st. (1898 - 1961)

was a painter, one of the founders of modern visual arts in Slovakia. In the years 1920-27 he studied at the School of Applied Arts and Crafts in Prague under Josef Schusser and Karel Vítězslav Mašek. He began his professional life as a teacher of drawing in Komárno, in Kláštor pod Znievom, and in Vrútky. Starting from 1936, he led scholarly courses at the State Institute for the improvement of Trades. In 1951, he moved to Bratislava and starting from 1953 worked at the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering of the Technical University as the senior associate professor at the Department of Drawing and Modeling. He is one of the people who has significant impact

on the appearance of children's book illustrations in Slovakia. His works can be found as an accompaniment to the texts of books such as *Zlaté hodinky* by Jozef Cíger Hronský, in *Povesti a divy* by Jozef Horák, and even *Čin Čin* by Ľudmila Podjavorinská, *Africký zápisník* by Ľudo Ondrejov or *Bájk*y by Jonáš Záborský.

Fedor Klimáček (1913 - 1975)

He was an illustrator, a painter and a graphic artist. He studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Prague, then at the Natural Sciences Faculty at Charles University, where he studied Drawing and Geography, then finally at the University of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the Czech Technical University in Prague. He is the author of a number of textbook illustrations and books for children and adolescents such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1955), *Tales of Castles* by Ján Domasta (1967) as well as poetry – for example *The Stars of the Torturer* by Ján Lenko (1947). He also contributed his drawings to magazines such as *Ohník*, *Zornička* and *Včielka*.

Mária Želibská (1913 - 1992)

She studied at the Prague Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design under Arnošt Hoffbauer. She was an artist who produced drawings, graphic designs, painting, illustrations and graphics. Among her works are those produced for *German Fairy Tales* by Johann and Wilhelm Grimm, *Medovníkový domček* by Mária Rázusová-Martáková, *Bohatier Kremienok* by Mária Ďuríčková, *Rozprávky z ostrova orchideí* by Rudo Moric, and *Rozprávky z Tisíc a jednej noci* by Hana Ferková.

Rudolf Fabry (1915 - 1982)

Started out as a public servant, later went to work for the Czechoslovak State Film, then for the Information Commission. He then went on to work at several magazines: *Práca*, *Nedeľa*, *Život*, *Svet socializmu*, *Film a divadlo*, *Kultúrny život* before he eventually by the mid-1960s took on a longer term position at the Center of Book Culture. In the seventies, he led the *Výtvarný život* magazine. In addition to writing poetry and prose, he also wrote librettos and screenplays and collaborated in compilation of

showcase publications dedicated to art and other imagery. Apart from literature, he devoted himself to the visual arts – he created collages and graphics for books – mostly those by surrealists such as *Dýchajte lazy* by Rudolf Dilong, *Královská reťaz* by Valentín Beniak, and *Slávme to spoločne* by Janko Silan.

Lubomír Kellenberger^(1921 - 1971)

How is it when two artists meet in one family? The father – Lubomír Kellenberger and the son, – Martin Kellenberger? This doesn't happen just for actors, but also for painters. Blood isn't water, yet through its own secret routes it seeps into the territory of the next generation, and spills over an unexplored landscape. Sometimes it seeps deep into the interior, turning into an underground river, and then bursts from the ground somewhere at the other end of the world.

So what was it like when a small boy looked over his father's shoulder in his studio? He watched as with a nimble brush he drove the horses with flowing manes, turning their heads behind him. Ribbons fluttered from a wooden cart and excited people shouted at him with wild joy. At other times, bandits were sneaking through the father's territory, walking in purple bridles on a dark mountain, hunched under the light of the stalking moon and their heavy souls. And what did the trees create?! They waved in the furious gusts of wind, they twisted limbs and branches in all directions, until beneath them the drawing paper cracked. And it was exactly like in *The Bandit Youth*: "The wind leapt on the trees like a great monkey." Immediately, wild animals emerged from the land of *The African Notebook*. Gracefully they moved in the tall grass, the startled cry of the birds betrayed their dangerous invisibility. Majestic freedom, grandeur, floated everywhere with its certitude, stunning the rough beauty of natural movement. More and more traces of quick arcing brushstrokes covered the mysterious landscape full of signs, which met up in all possible directions.

Then *The Peach Boy* emerged and invited the big man to the world of distant fairy tales. Who would have thought however that it would be so far! The last petal flew from the calyx of the hibiscus flower.

A white darkness spread over the countryside.

A masterwork of integrity, graphic precision, detailed minute drawing and typical stylized line shaking up the images are the common denominators of the illustrator's mastery, to which father and son remain faithful. Their family emblem is

linked by their relationship to the adventures of movement and their deep sense for the feeling of the inner relationship between man and country. With love and humility, they continue to rise together to the highest levels of the human soul.

Lubica Kepštová

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*(introduction to the exhibition
Lubomír and Martin Kellenberger — Family Affairs,
THIS! is the Gallery, 12. 5. – 29. 7. 2016)*



Štefan Cpin

Vincent Hložník

Viera Kraicová

Orešť Dubay



Štefan Cpin (1919 - 1971)

Štefan Cpin's illustrations. They were easily (and often) retraced. It was enough to place on them a scratch pad, transparent office paper and draw the strongest line with a pencil. And then transfer the sketch to memorials through the blue carbon (copy) paper: look at the original with one eye and with one hand quickly hatch and shade... princesses with hair down to the 'wasp waist'?, princes with wide shoulders, pointed ladies' shoes, lace, ribbons, jewels, flowers. Part of his illustrations stayed in the memory because 'they had to': for decades children were forced to read Jano, Čenkova's Children) or Holidays with Uncle Rafael. For years on the first of September 'The First Wreath' always lay on the desks of the first-graders. How to look at a work so tied in with the context of the period, with all that was 'obligatory'? Is it even possible to imagine it without the odour of memories? Or is it time (also) in fine arts to be so generous that gradually the layers of ideology are washed away, and only the 'clean' form remains?

We tried it, perhaps mostly because we have seen how Štefan Cpin, with his exceptional skill, handled the pencil as well as the brush. His water-colour improvisations were delicate, he created figures from puffs of colours. He did not hesitate to combine the 'childlike' and the 'adult' worlds, to use dark colours. Illustration in his conception was no authorial exhibitionism, but an accompaniment to the text; his fantasising was an aid to the reader. Small children knew what old Bodrík looked like, who accompanied the old shepherd, what kind of hair the little princess who stated that 'salt is more than gold' had, and also that defiant Jano clenches his fists when injustice is taking place. He drew his heroes' faces with clean, almost geometrically precise strokes, without drawing in the details. His pictures were always airy and transparent, he never filled up paper with pointless clusters of colours in the background, not even when he was experimented with – untraditional for children's illustration – colouring on a black background.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition *How to Draw Princesses, THIS! is the Gallery*, 8. 9. – 25. 11. 2016)

Vincent Hložník (1919 - 1997)

He belongs among the founding personalities of Slovak fine art painting, graphics and above all in the

area of book illustration. There exist several essential monographs by significant Slovak theoreticians on his creation. Their interest is proof that Hložník's work carries potential that draws theoreticians to measure him up – to describe him, to fit him into a period and historic context, to grasp his artistic principles and spiritual depth. But as Radislav Matuščík surmised back in 1969, it is astonishing that even if Vincent Hložník's work is receiving theoretical consideration, illustration in the context of his work remains nonetheless overlooked. Today, in 2018, we can say the same, that no Hložník monograph dedicated to book illustration has appeared on the shelves of bookshops, and this despite the fact that he rates alongside the best known drawers, such as Martin Benko, Ľudovít Fulla and the younger Albín Brunovský.

Vincent Hložník studied at the Prague Applied Arts School (UMRUM) in the tough wartime atmosphere of the occupied Czech and Morava Protectorate. Despite this uneasy period weighing on him his whole life, in the Prague artistic environment he came into contact with Czech and European art, in particular with the traditions of Czech book illustration. In 1942 he returned to Slovakia, and spent the war and post-war years in Martin and Žilina. In 1952 he was invited by the Dean of the newly-founded Fine Art Academy in Bratislava, Rudolf Pribiš, to teach and run the Graphics and Book Illustration studio, where he remained until 1972. In the 'Normalization' period he had to leave the school and his students, more or less banished for ideological reasons by the new Normalization administration of the school. Despite everything, he lived until his death in 1996 in the seclusion of his studio in his typical everyday "Hložník" creative commitment.

Book illustration has a special status in Slovak fine art, since it reflects the complicated history of our cultural history. It was never a natural part of fine art, and so it is not surprising that for artists, illustration and book art, the dialogue between literature and fine art, stood in for the non-existing artistic tradition. For the Slovak fine art scene, books were standing in for galleries and intellectual salons.

Vincent Hložník's entry into the art world was closely connected with the generation of Slovak surrealist poets. Certain principles of surrealism, especially the visionary and the surreal, appeared in his work. A formal constant in his work was above all expressionism and the impact of Picasso's works. It was for him initiatory, not only in some iconographic motifs (Picasso's circus subjects), but especially in the compositional principles and the solidly constructed shapes.

The starting-point for his illustrations is a firm and sure drawing whose typically recognizable character was developed back in his student days. And if we add to this the drawing of the image as a fantasy composition, (a closeness to surrealism) and the dramatization in the expression of the dense lines and shadings, we can state that in almost every illustration he crosses the border of 'genre restriction' as 'just' an accompaniment to the written text.

The first professional encounter with books was offered to him during his studies in Prague. These were sketches for the cover of matrix editions of Sophocles' *Antigone* in 1940. Two years later, six titles from the Neografia publishers came his way. The most widely circulated is the sketch cycle for three volumes of *Quo Vadis* by Adam Sienkiewicz (1942). Then came the meeting with Ján Smrek, at that time the editor of Elán's Komornej knižnice (Chamber Library), which turned out to be fateful. They put out fifteen titles during their creative cooperation and their mutual friendship. Prominent among them was Kostrov's *Ave Eva* (1943) with thirteen ink-drawings, and *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe (1943) with ten ink pen drawings as whole-page illustrations.

Specialist literature shows that Vincent Hložník illustrated over 300 titles. It is true however that he produced the best known of them in the course of the 50s and 60s, when he achieved the pinnacle of his artistic form. These were primarily aquarelle ink drawings for the books *Don Quixote* by Miquel de Cervantes (1951), *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1955), *Fairy Tales* by Hans Christian Andersen (1956) and *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1959). In this "series" he elaborated a holistic, synthetic concept of the beautiful book, making use of poetic associative composition – In this series he developed a holistic, synthetic concept involving the reproduction of motifs and unusual views and under-views. This associative compounding was also used in his graphic illustrations, for example in *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* (1959). The pinnacle of the graphic line in book production is a series of linocuts, where he relied on the motifs of free graphic creation, and assembled them to a fantasy conception of illustration for the poetry collection of Laco Novomeský – *Villa Tereza* (1963).

As the peak of Hložník's illustration art is considered the illustrations for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri from 1964. He created thirty-four header illustrations and the same number of whole-page illustrations – linocuts. A second such achievement is the cult work of European literature, Goethe's *Faust*. The book came out in 1966, after almost ten years of preparation. It is no exaggeration to say that Hložník's *Faust* not only has an

exceptional position in the history of Slovak illustration, but also in a competition of artistic interpretations of Faust by leading world-class artists. With a dry needle technique, he used to the full measure the associative grouping of motifs along with his characteristic visionary pathos. They are not just an equal addendum to his graphic and painting work, but deservedly (!) belong among the most significant chapters of our modern cultural history.

Despite the fact that for Vincent Hložník the text was always binding, he was able to detach himself from the objectivity of the external world. He constructed the philosophical concept of his work on the polarity of the terrestrial and the metaphysical concepts of his creation. It was precisely on this polarity of the terrestrial and the metaphysical that he constructed the philosophical conception behind his work. He overcame sensual and sometimes painful reality in a number of directions – in the surreal, the visionary and religious but, above all and always, in the universally humanistic.

Beata Jablonská

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(introduction to the exhibition The Power of the Line, THIS! is the Gallery, 5. 9. – 29. 11. 2018)

Viera Kraicová (1920 - 2012)

We know Viera Kraicová as a painter “with stars in her eyes”. Painting for her was an instrument of clairvoyance, often revealing horizons of shapes and colours that were unsuspected and astonishing, explosive products of her energy as draughtsman and painter. Her art was close to the pure conception of children’s work or the art of modern primitives, so-called art brut, art in the raw state. But there was this difference between them, and it was not a small one: in Kraicová’s case her playfulness, purity of heart, immediate and sometimes enchantingly childlike “innocence of the eye”, though they welled from the natural human being, nonetheless were controlled by a creative desire that was lacking in the artists of naturalness and natural settings. One finds a notable resemblance here and there, but in modern art that is not accidental... And precisely this conception of creative work was transmitted to another area of her artistic activity, which was illustration.

Viera Kraicová the illustrator is possibly less well known as a painter. But that in no way detracts from the significance and power of this sphere of her activity. She devoted herself to illustration, one may say, systematically and perseveringly, from the

mid-1950s to the early 1980s, and her intended audience was most frequently the child reader. Although she had not been specifically trained in this field of art, she compensated for this by self-study and seeking her own means of expression. She approached the tasks of illustration in a very honest way and developed a characteristic and genuinely modern signature, connecting not only with the book's content but also its aim and object. Fedor Kriška spoke in this regard of a "metamorphosis". Her illustrative work was highly rated, and rightly so. In the illustrations of children's books we can find the basic principles of her work in crystalline form, though transformed through the specific filter of the genre. Kraicová's illustration was not just an epic accompaniment to a literary text, simply comprehensible at a glance. Even though she respected the parameters of illustration aimed at children, and their emotional world was close to her (children and their games often served as the narrative frame of her pictures), by its conception her illustration was artistically autonomous. Either she founded it on the power of expressive colours, or contrastingly she chose a striking black-and-white range, complemented by colour as accentuation. Lapidary use of a simplifying reduction of shapes; the dramatic power of a somewhat primitivising, even childlike, and apparently uncertainly flowing, lyrically felt line – by such means the books illustrated by Kraicová stimulated and cultivated their readers' imagination. With a contemporary sensibility recast in what was then, in Czechoslovakia, the new technique of drawing and painting collage, she illustrated Němcová's *Babička* (Granny, 1965, published in four editions, GMB), *Sedmikráska* by Mária Rázusová-Martáková (Daisy, 1966), and Erben's *Zlatovláska* (Goldilocks, 1968, GMB). Most frequently, however, she drew and painted in an "airy" watercolour, or tempera and ink; illustration came to have ever more influence on her free painting, and vice versa. In the 1960s her illustration of Publius Ovidius Naso's *Premeny* (Metamorphoses, 1969, SNG) helped prepare her for her supreme achievements on the small space. Given that she was narrating poetic events of antique mythology pictorially, her expression became more figurative to a certain extent, but it lost nothing of its poetic and painterly power. She based her expressive capacity on a richly coloured, resonant surface and pen sketching for precise detail. She attained to an eastern, or even "cosmic", simplicity in her illustration of a selection of folk ballads *Išlo dievča po vodu* (The Girl Went for Water, 1969, GMB) and *Čakanka* by Ľudmila Podjavorinská (Chicory, 1972, SNG). How conscientiously she approached her tasks as an illustrator is attested by the selection presented in the current exhibition in Toto! Gallery. Even though her best illustrations have found their way to state and public collections, many

variants and preparatory (artistically distinctive) works remained among her effects.

Katarína Bajcurová

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(introduction to the exhibition *Rewinding, THIS! is the Gallery*, 10. 9. – 26. 11. 2020)

Orest Dubay^(1919 - 2005)

It might seem that Orest Dubay's place in the history of Slovak visual art is unchallengeably secure. His graphic works are found on sale, here and there his creative achievement is commemorated in a group exhibition, and on occasion an artwork of his appears in reproduction on social media. Indeed, it is not so long since one of his graphic works was used on the cover of a book issued by a prestigious small publishing house! But if someone happens to search for a monograph or would like to encounter his art in the permanent exhibitions of certain public galleries in Slovakia, the attempt will not be successful. Signs are that currently Orest Dubay's graphic production is a heritage set aside, which is perceived as existing, though it is genuinely known by very few. Although a number of catalogues and two slim publications, issued before 1989, are proof of his involvement in the cultural practice of visual art within socialist culture, today they suffice only as a source of basic information about the existence of individual works.

Now that culture and art has had over thirty years of existence in democratic conditions, something more could be expected. One might hope for a true image of modern Slovak graphic art, acknowledging its role in the avantgarde movements and in the constitution of socialist cultural politics. Also, reflection is lacking on the roles and personal weight of the actors/participants in the art scene and their institutions, as well as the particular art movements. Our culture suffers from many infirmities, but the non-cultivation of memory is one of the most typical. Fortunately, Orest Dubay's work is not in danger of falling entirely into oblivion, in particular thanks a vital surge of interest among the young generation (and not only graphic artists). They see an autonomous modernism in his art, and also a pictorial and thematic poetics where they find something close to their own perception of the contemporary world. The question is timely: what are we to make of Orest Dubay's work? Making use of some marginal notes, which is all the prescribed limit of this text permits, let us halt for a while at some of the important moments of his life and art.

A NOTE FOR A STUDY

Orest Dubay was one of that war generation whom World War II caught on the passage from youth to adulthood. Their ideals and values were therefore always constructed and measured against the presence of wartime tragedy. Dubay was born in a village that now no longer exists, Veľká Poľana (Svidník region) in the family of a Greek Catholic priest. Even despite the absence of the father, who went to seek work in America, he was supported in his studies by his six siblings, thanks to the stubborn determination of his mother. He completed his secondary studies in what was still Czechoslovak Mukačevo, which was occupied by Hungary after the Vienna Arbitration. With the break-up of Czechoslovakia, his wish to study art in Prague could not be fulfilled. He chose Bratislava and registered for the Department of Drawing and Painting at the Slovak University of Technology. Despite the fascist totalitarian regime of that time, he studied from 1939 to 1943, and his encounters with his teacher Ján Mudroch and such fellow-pupils as Viliam Chmel, Ladislav Guderna, Ervín Simian and Alojz Klimo were crucial in forming his world outlook and creative orientation. At that time he became close to the intergenerational group of writers and visual artists which was later called Avantgarde 38. Although it has been said that, because of his solitary nature, he took little part in the bohemian life of those times, nonetheless the doctrines of surrealism and supra-realism made their way to him.

A NOTE ON HIS BEGINNINGS

In the literature it is said that he made his first graphic sheet in 1945 with an impression of an elaborated wooden relief. One must not forget that graphic techniques were done "on a shoestring"; artists used makeshift instruments, engraving old boards with pen-knives and nails. Perhaps it was partly thanks to his practical need to search for other possibilities that Orest Dubay discovered the relevance for art of experimentation and using untraditional approaches. One might sum up by saying that Dubay's attempt at a modern graphic expression was a result of a number of interlocking efforts. The first was based on material and technological experimentation. In the 1950s that was an uncommon and rare practice, though it found its broader background a decade later in the milieu of abstract informel. Dubay's technological experiment began with wax drawings; in time he shifted to the graphic techniques of engraving and prints from cardboard, various PVC moulds, plastic bags, and needless to say, linocuts and wood. A further characteristic feature was his seeking of and sustained focus on the ordinary, whatever was common. In the banality and ordinariness of the theme he sought its undramatic obviousness and depth. His cultivation of artistic

naive-ism had roots in Paul Gauguin's paintings and became a definite generational feature of Orest Dubay's generation. One found it also in Ernest Zmeták's work, who was primarily following the principles of the folk woodcut, but also in Ervín Semian, Alojza Klimo and Vincent Hložník and the sculptor Rudolf Uher. The third and final priority for Dubay was the search for expression in an adequate form, meaning the simplest. Here one is thinking of Dubay's grand detail, the generous flat conception and optically playful line, situated in a frontier zone between concrete and abstract. For example, the line in his picture becomes a horizon losing itself in the infinite, at other times an undulant sea and a ray of light, or "merely" a rhythm and optical play of the black and white surface.

A NOTE ON GRAPHIC ART DURING THE SECOND MODERNISM

Even if graphic art is an essential component of contemporary Slovak modernism, it only came into full bloom with the arrival on the scene of a numerous generation of visual artists at the beginning of the war years of the 1940s. The intensity of this artistic wave was such that we may call it a second modernism, because it not only continued but further developed the programme of Mikuláš Galanda and Ľudovít Fulla, the first Slovak modernist artists. This despite the cramping of opportunities in Slovak reality as it was then, especially when burdened by the war and by the fascist totality of the Slovak state. Orest Dubay first exhibited at a group exhibition in the Zemedel'ské Múzeum in Bratislava in 1943, together with Ladislav Guderna and Ervín Semian, and he and Ernest Zmeták had solo exhibitions in 1947 in the UBS Pavilion in Bratislava. At that time Koloman Sokol made contact with him and offered him a place as his assistant at SVŠT and Comenius University Pedagogic Faculty in 1947. We know that Sokol's professional career did not last long, and after his departure Orest Dubay was called to the graphic department of the newly-founded Academy of Fine Arts and Design (VŠVU). He continued there until 1984, spending a quarter century in the graphic department as teacher and head of department; in fact, from 1968 to 1971 he was also VŠVU's rector. Surprisingly, his teaching activity has never been assessed until now, even in terms of his influence on his charges or the influence of his "school" historically in Slovak graphic art. It would seem that his teaching contribution, based essentially on a search for individual creative characteristics and predispositions in the adepts of art, lost out to the powerful "visual collectivism" of the graphic school of Vincent Hložník and his successor Albín Brunovský.

A NOTE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND BOOK ILLUSTRATION

"I love reality, a certain sobriety. Simply, I like to stand with both feet firmly on the ground." When he uttered these words, Orest Dubay was at the peak of his creative powers. Somewhere here one can trace the essential quality of his work, based on a simple symbolism, expressed via specific features of reality. All he needed was a plain fragment (tree, bird, aeroplane, flower, aerial, apartment house) to set in play a pictorial story in black and white. The goal of his strivings was paradoxical: a hidden drama, inwardly motivated and drawing upon the contradictoriness of the peaceful, genre-coloured scene and exalting it by a mystifying chiaroscuro. Dubay's dramatic feeling is therefore deep, not pretended, and may be found even in the most ordinary scene. His focus on genre, rejecting any literary-dependent, thematic allegory, was remote from the fantasy graphic art (directed towards a poetical and associative composition of the image) which his own generation was inclined to.

Dubay brought his graphic signature, the inwardly motivated abbreviation of the real form, into book illustration also, which he thought of as part of his free creation. Hence the illustrations for the most part consisted of a selection from his free graphic sheets. His work is mentioned only rarely in histories of book illustration, and yet he has more than fifty titles to his credit. His drawings, woodcuts and linocuts are part of the dust jackets, frontispieces and general pictorial provision of what are now cult books, including Štefan Žáry's *Wonderful Sober Boat* (Slovenský spisovateľ, 1960), Laco Novomeský's *Thirty Minutes to Town* (Slovenský spisovateľ, 1963), *A Girl Went for Water* by Mária Ďuričková (Mladé letá, 1980), *A Burial Mound Stands There: Ballads by Slovak Poets* (Tatran, 1978), and the iconic jackets of William Faulkner's *Light in August* (Tatran, 1969) and Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (Tatran, 1967).

A FINAL NOTE ON THE FUTURE

Were it not for the activities of artistic associations, Orest Dubay's work would have remained confined in past time for some years to come. Just now, perhaps, we are at the early stages of communicating and making it accessible to our contemporaries. The first step is (using the most vital medium, the book) to open doors to his cult illustrations and others less well-known. And in due course, maybe it will be possible to get his graphic work into exhibition spaces, even as an up-to-date topic for debates in visual art. We have so much work ahead of us! To initiate research and documentation of his teaching career and his influence on the

development of graphic art and book illustration, and to attempt a critical reflection on his place in the modern history of Slovak graphic art. So that we need not have recourse to half-a-century-old books and quote the equally old statements of people whose memories even then were already hazy.

Beata Jablonská

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(introduction to the exhibition *The Dubay Code, THIS! is the Gallery*, 16. 9. – 11. 11. 2021)



Ferdinand Hložník

Alojz Klimo

Albert Marenčin

Viliam Weisskopf

Jozef Baláž

Róbert Dúbravec

Jarmila Čihánková



Ferdinand Hložník (1922 - 2006)

'Of course, that yellow reader!' That was the reaction of almost everyone I told I was preparing an exhibition of Ferdinand Hložník's work. Really, who wouldn't remember him? The so-called 'Children of Husák', the fifty-somethings, all remember his book. They found it on their desks the first day of school. All of them. There were no other readers back in the days of 'real socialism'. They are spoken of as one of the symbols remembered, sometimes with enthusiasm, from 'those times' - like the Rocket lamp, the STOPY book editions, endless jumping over rubber bands. We can even find that those readers (stamped with bees and piglets) have remained on family bookshelves for decades. Others look at those schoolbooks (like everything from that period) with a degree of disrespect. They say that they seemed out of date even back then when we were taught from them. Like those clothes - those big ribbons on our heads, knee-high socks! It's not easy to find a fair point of view. Because even if we do anything we can when dealing with works from that time in which appeared school collectivism (literally), divisions arise, whether among the viewers or the professionals. Personal memories of that period become the periscope through which they look at it. All the same: this reader is a compact didactic creation. First-graders just learning to read go through their own stories. The book was created such that right from the start the children identified with some of the characters that will appear and later on in the book go through lots of different things. Such banality: they're going to wait for the bus, go to their grandma's in the village, they're going to study at the kitchen table and then eat there with their parents, sit in the classroom and do sums, write at the blackboard... simply everything that they themselves do. It's set somewhere in the subconscious - 'that one in the red skirt is just like me!' Before Hložník's concept, this was not so obvious (nor after him). The illustrating in the schoolbooks seemed rather like ornamentation around the text rather than its equal partner. The art historian Beáta Jablonská says about this textbook: 'Hložník's reader is exceptional, It was without compromise' (as part of the assignment). For some, it was perhaps their first and last meeting with the principles of artistic layout. With an image of stylized reality. Previously we had seen a lot of 'cheap pseudorealisms' everywhere around, and then anything possible, à la Disney. The great thing about it that was we saw the pictures in the readers as somehow natural, they were part of us. So that when we went to a gallery, we didn't feel out of place.' Right. For a certain time there was silence concerning the works that are considered too

closely connected with the period of so-called real socialism (and this reader came out more than a quarter of a century ago). They were locked away in storage - both physical and in memory. No matter how legitimate the reasons were, today (and actually for a while) we know that erasing, ignoring and a skipping over certain names and works in artistic discourse (no matter with what good intentions) is impoverishing. On the contrary, the whirlwind of different opinions, the view of the works in not only the aesthetic but also in the social and political contexts in which they appeared, makes them stronger.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition
*They are carrying a bandsaw to uncle,
THIS! is the Gallery, 15. 2. – 21. 4. 2022*)

Alojz Klimo ^(1922 - 2000)

Alojz Klimo chose a path that led to official rejection and, from the 1970s, the restriction of his work of his work to outside the official scene. The field of illustration brought him not only pleasure but also the approval of his colleagues. He received many awards for his work, among others inclusion on the IBBY honorary register in 1978 and the H. Christian Andersen diploma. How did Klimo excel in the field of illustration creation? It was due to his original artistic approach to children's book illustration. As his technique he chose collage, not exactly a new technology – it has been used in modern art since Cubism, but very rarely in this country. He made use of it for the first time in 1961 in illustrations for the folding picture book *On Gingerbread House*. He began in illustration work much earlier however, shortly after graduating from the Prague Academy of Arts Architecture & Design in 1948. This was for a book by K. Bendová, *Čačky-hračky* (Trinkets/Toys), and from that time Klimo worked regularly in book illustration and skilfully illustrated over sixty titles. Right from the beginning he adopted a greatly simplified artistic form that paid no attention to the slavish illustration of details. In illustrations from the early period, for example, E. Chmelová's *Set, Sun, Set* (1955), he followed a characteristically basic, simple form, principally graphic, where he came to a certain form of minimalism (a cycle of woodcuts *Čierne na bielom* (Black on White), 1959). In work with collages he not only developed a singular approach, but also a distinct artistic form. Klimo knew very well that the illustrations genre

has limits insofar as it is reliant on the literary story, and that this is the difference with free creation. In spite of this, he rejected detailism. I believe that his non-illustrative attitude and the choice of technology follows from the character of free choice. Klimo was not a classic drawer (like V. Hložník for example) and accordingly avoided the pitfalls of descriptive narrative. By its nature collage corresponded to the possibilities of shape simplicity and a playful creative process. His artistic conception differed from other illustrators precisely in that he did not follow the details and the narrative side but rather worked with an artistic shorthand and suggestion. His method can be derived from free creation, where the sign (surface) was the basic element of the image. In illustration too he uses a variety of structures, various types of paper and approaches to working with paint. At the same time he keeps in mind his childish audience and often uses their optic for perceiving things and environments. The character of the shape is determined by the collage technique. He makes use of roughly irregularly cut and torn paper from which he assembles forms only in approximate outlines. Here he gives the task a humorous and grotesque interpretation – for example, his method of expression in the eyes, in the limbs... The greatest importance is given to colouring. He lets the coloured spots spread on the paper, thus achieving a rich layering of colour. It is the colourity aspect that most closely unites illustration with free creation. In his pictures too he uses the method of applying paint to an unwashed canvas pasted with paper that soaks up the paint. In his colour work he is closest to Fulla, and can be classed among his successors. He has a similar feel for colour, for the use of its emotional properties, its shininess and affecting contrasts.

Eva Trojanová

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*(introduction to the exhibition Cock-a-doodle-doo,
THIS! is the Gallery, 12. 4. – 15. 6. 2018)*

Albert Marenčin ^(1922 - 2019)

after the end of World War II, started working in Košice in the *Národná obroda* daily. He was later awarded a scholarship and studied in Paris (1945 – 1948), at the Sorbonne and simultaneously also at the University of Political Sciences and the IDHEC film school. He worked for Slovenský film, the Slovak News Agency, *Národná obroda* and as a correspondent and radio

news anchor for the Czechoslovak broadcast of the French Radio in Paris. He was a surrealist, and, in parallel with his texts, would produce collages as their equal counterparts. Among his illustrations are those for Štefan Žáry's poetry collection *Múza oblieha Tróju*.

Viliam Weisskopf^(1922 - 1964)

This is a different patron! The virtuosity of his drawing lies mainly in the recognizability of the subjects - everyone knows "who is who" in those pictures. Yes, he's a propagandist, he interacts with the times, he trusts what he sees and hears, he even co-creates it. For a long time, on a long-term basis, he puts himself into boxes that it is not advisable to open. And yet this type of humour has its place. Imitation, exaggeration, mockery, even hateful tones... as a legitimate authorial approach. It survives and sensitizes because, and behind it all, somewhere in the back of it all, is a message - the desire for a better world.

Born in Červený Kostelec, after graduating from high school he continued his studies at the Akademie für Graphische Künste und Buchgewerbe in Leipzig. After the war, he worked as a graphic designer and art editor. He edited the magazines *Domov a svet* (Home and World), *Dnešné Slovensko* (Current Slovakia) and *Let* (Flight). He collaborated with the weekly *Slobodný rozhlas* (Free Radio). He drew for the magazine *Šidlo*, which was banned by the communists in March 1948, then became a key collaborator for the weekly *Roháč* (Stag Beetle). He illustrated, for example, books by Ladislav Mňačko, Peter Karvaš, and Rudolf Fabry.

Jozef Baláž^(1923 - 2006)

was a graphic designer, painter, illustrator, creator of so-called Art Protises (artistic designs for a specific sort of nonwoven textile), and, above all, postage stamp designs. He trained as a reproduction graphic artist in the Slovak Grafia, then studied at the Slovak Technical University under Koloman Sokol, Dezider Milly, and Ján Mudroch, and eventually graduated from the College of Fine Arts and Design's Department of Landscape Painting. He created many designs for magazines – such as *Život*. He was a member of the Graphics' Club. His illustrations include, among many others, those for *Kytice* by Karel Jaromír Erben, *Slávy dcéra* by Ján Kollár, *Nikdy nie si sama* by Vladimír Mináč, as well as *Maroško* by Martin Rázus, and *Slovenské rozprávky* by Anton Habovštiak.

Róbert Dúbravec (1924 - 1976)

he studied at the Department of Drawing and Painting of the Slovak Technical University, then at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Pedagogy of the Comenius University in Bratislava. He was mainly a teacher, lecturing at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, but also at the Faculty of Education in Banská Bystrica. His work in illustration is characterized by a strong black line – after all, he most often used the technique of black-and-white, or colorized woodcut, and later linocut. He illustrated several books of legends and fairy tales, with Maria Rázusová – Martáková's *Junácka pasovačka* in particular becoming a cult favorite, while others included *Pastierik a zbojníci* by Anton Habovštiak, *Tatranský zlatý jeleň* by Miroslav Anton Húska and *Kamenní králi* by Ján Štiavnický.

Jarmila Čihánková (1925 - 2017)

No doubt at least the older of you will remember *Robinson*, a sensitive novel about a quickly maturing individual, *Blažena*, written in the 1940s by Marie Majerová. The main character, bound in the space of four colours, partly drawn, partly collaged, is recognizable at first glance. Hair in a braid, all angular and bony, her identity is made up by 'quick strokes' in some kind of pen sketches. After the death of her mum, on the pages of her tale she struggles, picture after picture, with 'female weapons' – with pots and pans, dusters, the vacuum cleaner, iron... and progressively, as she learns to master them, she herself changes, matures, in that confined space of her dusty island, her own flat she becomes herself. These illustrations were simply 'chic'.

But do you also remember the author who created them?

Jarmila Čihánková – herself a sort of *Robinson* who during her whole life mastered seven (artistic) trades, moving from technique to technique. She upset the defined genres. She was not simply an illustrator. Slovak art history remembers her rather as a woman who understood the language of construction and succeeded in creating within the codes of geometric abstraction. But not only this. She engaged herself in the creation of tapestries and artprints, in which she wove motifs inspired by blue-printing. Moreover, both in the years 1970 and 1988, together with Milan Adamčiak she staged public space installations that combined music and fine art. In the years 1958 – 1966, together with Viera Kraicová, Olga Bartošíková and Tamara Klimová, she belonged to *Group 4*,

the first Slovak female art collective, which the art historian Ľuba Belohradská termed an 'exceptional initiative, which made up for the lack of female artists in the male-dominated world of fine arts'. She also belonged among the founders of the Club of Concretists. She was a painter, a caricaturist, a graphic artist... She was attracted by and interested in 'everything'.

The illustration work of Jarmila Čihánková is not voluminous. In the period of the sixties and seventies she produced twenty books, more or less. With the possible exception of *Three Poems* by Jevgenija Levтуšenka she did not have the possibility to accompany her work with 'big' authorial names or well-known texts. She stick-handled her way through editors, not remaining long with any, swapping themes and genres. Perhaps for the best. She never got in the habit of 'stealing' from her own approaches. Today you can go through the books, open one after the other, and if you didn't know they were 'hers', you'd have the feeling they were created by a variety of authors. They mimic, they change, not only in dependence on time, but also on stylizations and techniques.

It's worthwhile looking at what she created. So let's stop for a bit and look more closely at least at three of her book productions.

Let's go back for a quick look at the best-known – *Robinson* by Marie Majerová. The rendition of the story, which begins tragically mapping the process by which an adolescent girl discovers her own springs of strength and emancipates herself in the world of adults, illustrates Jarmila Čihánková's ability to put reality aside and to draw emotion from the text, to transfer it into the picture and, through recurring symbols, establish rhythmic contact with the reader, be it he or she. How does it work? Simply read, and you will feel that she's got under your skin, that you can hardly wait for another meeting with the heroine a few pages later. This concept is clear to see, especially if we place side by side other illustrations of this book – for example by Karol Svolinský or Helena Chvojková. The contrast between their captioning, their striving for consistency with the text in opposition to the turbo-dynamics of Jarmila Čihánková, which takes the leitmotif from a template, as described by the art historian František Holešovský: "The form and the outer appearance of the heroine lose significance, her parallel with the literary content shifts to other places in which relationships and emotions play the main role, expressed not on their artistic reflection, but co-created by the interplay with the perceiver himself."

The author chose a different path when illustrating the *Everyone Dies Alone* by David Howarth. In it she completely suppressed the recognizability of the main characters, leaving only silhouettes of them

(essentially it is a novel about tactical survival and the art of espionage, written according to actual events during the Second World War when the Norwegian resistance fighter Jan Baalsrud had, without equipment and without food, to make it through enemy lines to Sweden). Everything that takes place on the pages of the novel seems to be immersed in a grey mist. That's power – reading and watching. As the fatigue of the main character increases, so the artistic accompaniment sharpens, fewer and fewer figurative motifs appear, until they are completely lost in the landscape. The artist is again (for the umpteenth time) playing with the energy of the story, supporting it emotionally. The collages are sharply cut from pre-prepared (painted and printed) resources. She often uses the same patterns for various illustrations, sort of tourism markings. These then act on the reader as triggers for memories of the already read.

In the fairy-tale book by Jula Zborovjana *Open Up, Fairy tale!* Jarmila Čihánková even allowed herself to work with 'emptiness'. On white-coloured paper, highly-stylized elements - plants, flowers, animals – stand out and act on the young reader. By moving away from the story, placing only dots on the pages – as if tearing from the page only a word or two, no situation, no story-line – she was again moving illustration somewhere farther, to unexpected levels. She was letting air into it – and it worked.

If we also stop at other books that she created, we will find in them very specific work with coloured tonality – perhaps it does not occur to the casual reader, but those involved in book graphics certainly stop at the 'how' of these books: "Today it probably doesn't occur to anyone how coloured backgrounds were made, 'back in the day' – namely, that coloured cellophane or full-surface, often painted coloured background surfaces, were used for colour tinting to enhance the emotion. When I scanned the illustrations, I had the opportunity to see them all together and I realized that it is such a game of colour. You say to yourself, 'Ah, a coloured book!', but really each illustration has used only one colour".

In Jarmila Čihánková's estate we also found drawings on envelopes which had a daring style, a tone similar to that she used in her free creation – and meanwhile 'in an analogous way' – designs created from coloured paper, compasses, scissors, rubbings. You look around and say to yourself, 'how little was needed to create such resounding work'.

Ida Želinská

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(introduction to the exhibition *Mrs. Robinson, THIS! is the Gallery*, 8. 9. – 16. 11. 2022)

Marián Čunderlík
Anastázia Miertušová
Ladislav Nesselman
Pavel Maňka
Otokar Bachorík
Ján Švec



Marián Čunderlík (1926 - 1983)

In 20th century visual art in Slovakia one finds several prominent partner duos who contributed to shaping its development. One such couple undoubtedly is the husband-and-wife team of Anastázia Mierušová and Marián Čunderlík, who arrived on the visual art scene in the difficult period of the late 1950s. During the early years of the following decade, they were among the progressive artists turning away from figuration towards abstract expression. Besides the painting art proper, both were intensively involved in book illustration and illustration generally. For many artists at that time, book illustration became a means of artistic fulfilment in a more intimate format. Due to the contemporary social and political relaxation, there was currently an intensification of publishing activity and a greater emphasis on the visual form of the book. Some of the artists who found their way to working on books were not artistically focused on illustration, book graphics or promotional art and had graduated in other subjects, but they came to illustration from a position of free art disciplines. That was reflected in their meditative way of thinking and an approach that was frequently experimental, unconditioned by formal conventions.

Marián Čunderlík (1926 – 1983) and Anastázia Mierušová (1927 – 2002) were close to the artists of the Mikuláš Galanda Group in terms of age, but their art tended in other directions. Though it was only 1953 when they completed their university studies, their work gradually became distanced from the figure and tended towards a stratification, or a mutual tension, of the structures emerging from the painterly material. In the second half of the 1960s and the early 70s they tended towards a more constructivist rendering of shape, with a leaning to Elementarism. Both of them participated in exhibitions by the unofficial grouping called Bratislava Confrontations. From 1965 they began to incline more decisively towards geometrical form, limitation of colour and more summary composition of paintings, graphics and assemblages.

Marián Čunderlík was born in *Motyčky*, near Banská Bystrica, and after graduating from VŠVU he engaged intensively in painting, graphic art and illustration. As early as the first half of the 1950s, the genre of political caricature appeared in his work, and he executed a number of promotional posters. In the early 1960s he created several book jackets (Pavol Bunčák: *Prostá reč* (Plain Language, 1962), Alfonz Bednár: *Sklený vrch* (Glass Peak, 1962), Gwyn Griffin: *Boží vyvolenci* (Sons of God, 1962 etc.)), which represented a move from figuration towards cut or torn fragments, with a combination of various

two-dimensional designs, or with overlapping surfaces and the input of a photographic fragment. There is a notable shift towards the register of the visual symbol in both script and typography (Heinrich Böll: *Billiard o pol desiatej* (Billiards at Half-past Nine, 1962)). In 1963 Čunderlík designed editions of works by Tatarka. Here the motif of the macro-structure was applied, in the spirit of the contemporary tendency towards informel (Dominik Tatarka: *Démon súhlasu* (The Demon of Consent)), or the contrast between the pure coloured surface and the torn scraps of paper (Dominik Tatarka: *V úzkosti hľadania* (Being Anxious About Searching), 1963). The surface of the illustration is a montage of several pictorial realities. Later, besides the artistic treatment of a dust jacket, he applies the collage technique to illustration proper. A representative example is Jacques Prevert, *Tá láska* (This Love, 1964), where the cover is executed with a pen drawing but the illustrations work by the method of photomontage. In one of his uncompleted designs for the frontispiece of the collection one can see work with varying typography of the individual letters assembled in the author's name and the collection's title. He also enhances the author's details using a typewriter, and hence the design by its visual character evokes forms of visual poetry based on seriality. The final form of the frontispiece for This Love has a more conservative form. He used the idea of the typographic cover, employing the aesthetics of the typewriter, for Wolfgang Hildesheimer's novel *Tynset* (1967).

The artist's identifiable signature, based on incorporation of a figure or its torso in a fading abstract background, or an associative collage evoking the avantgarde tradition and the techniques of surrealism, was evident in Valadimír Reisel's collection *Láska na posledný pohľad* (Love at Last Sight, 1963) and in the combined edition of three collections by Miroslav Válek: *Dotyky – Príťažlivosť – Nepokoj* (Touches – Attraction – Unrest, 1964). The covers of Vojtech Mihálik's *Útek za Orfeom* (Flight After Orpheus, 1965) and F.E. Sillnapää: *Stretnutie* (The Meeting, 1965), are abstract, with the universalising central motif of the circle hovering above a structurally executed surface. There is an atmosphere that evokes a state of weightlessness, an unshackling of thought from pragmatic reality. Čunderlík applied associativity and the play of the irrational, in his combination of collage with delicate line drawing, on the cover of *Muž a žena čisto biely* (A Man and a Woman Absolutely White, 1967) by the surrealist Andre Breton. He also used collage, as a motif of the "collision" of two realities in his poster art, aimed principally at the promotion of Slovak art films (*Prípad Barnabáš Kos* /The Case of Barnabáš Kos, 1964/, *Senzi mama* /Senzi Mama, 1964/, *Tvár*

v okne / Face in the Window, 1963/, *Zmluva s diablom* / Pact with the Devil, 1967/, *Kryštál' z Istanbulu* / Crystal from Istanbul 1966/, *Kým sa skončí táto noc* / When This Night Ends, 1964/).

Both Mierušová and Čunderlík made notable contributions to the artistic identity of SPKK (Society of Friends of Beautiful Books) of the Slovenský spisovateľ publishing house. The fading out of the Brussels style is evident in Čunderlík's designs combining pastel geometric areas, collage and the figure indicated in symbolic form (e.g. Jurij German: *Príbeh L'ošku zlodēja* (The Story of Loshka the Thief, 1962), Šalom Alejchem: *Bludné hviezdy* (Wandering Stars, 1962 etc.) In Mierušová's executions, especially in 1966-67, the edition maintained an integral graphic identity while dividing the area of the wrapper into sections with author's name, title and pictorial field (A. I. Kuprin: *Jama* (The Pit, 1966), V. G. Lidin: *Odpadlík* (The Defector, 1967), S. Borodin: *Vatry na pochode* (The Camp Bonfires), 1966 etc.).

Also appealing are her grotesque registers, using formal excess and hypertrophy, as in the covers of detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, *Návrat Sherlocka Holmesa* (Return of Sherlock Holmes, 1966) and Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Príhody Pátera Browna* (The Adventures of Father Brown, 1967). The collage motif, associated with the procedure of using appropriated material, torn from its natural setting, as a resource, appears autonomously in several titles (e.g. John Steinbeck: *Túlavý autobus* (The Wayward Bus, 1967). A possible closure of the curve from free creation to illustration is the visual aspect of Gunnar Ekelöf's *Skúška vodou* (Trial by Water, 1971). In her illustrations she takes account of the relationship of the geometrical frame, which closes the layered, fragile texture of the surface, in the sense of an attempted systematisation of the spontaneous gesture.

In the book art of Anastázia Miertušová and Marián Čunderlík I find several common features, based on combination of the technical image with a structure that sometimes makes an "op-art" impression, while at other times having the motif of perforation or a "masonry" structure. The abstract surface is complemented by the figure and frequently also by a photographic montage or collage detail, which is further enriched by the accent of colour. Miertušová lets the optical impression fade out in William Somerset Maugham's *Júlia, ty si čarovná* (Julia, You Are Magical, 1969). This retinal character, with a mild allusion to "psychedelic" visuality, appears even earlier in the strikingly attractive cover of Heinrich Mann's *Vážny život* (A Serious Life, 1967). Here she works with a text which complements the atmosphere of the street at night with the associative glow of neon. We also find a tendency towards

retinal illusion in Čunderlík's execution of a book of poems by Vasko Pop, *Večne neviditeľná* (Eternally Invisible, 1966).

In the 1970s the intensity of the artists' illustration work diminished. Marián Čunderlík was expelled from the Slovak Union of Visual Arts in 1972 on the grounds of his inclination towards non-figural expression. He left Bratislava and lived away from the centre of attention, in the village of Tri studničky in Demänovská dolina. The situation of political normalisation, as well as family circumstances, did not allow the artists to continue their intensive creative activity. In 1980 their marriage broke up, and three years later Marián Čunderlík died in tragic circumstances.

Hence, particularly in the 1960s these artists' production is characterised by intensive work and strong basic ideas. Work with a dichotomy of the geometrical and the figural is a shared motif of their illustrative works, which unfolded in parallel with their free creations. The cutting of images and their combination and arrangement in the manner of film montage is a procedure whereby they jointly made a foundation for the modern visual culture and illustration of books in Slovakia.

Ján Kralovič

(introduction to the exhibition
Anastázia Miertušová, Marián Čunderlík — Family Affair,
THIS! is the Gallery, 15. 4. – 15. 7. 2021)

Anastázia Miertušová (1927 - 2002)

One of the first books of poetry I encountered in my parents' library was Válek's *Zakázaná láska* (Forbidden Love), illustrated by Albín Brunovský (1987, Smena). Both of these artists were by then established figures; Válek, indeed, had been Minister of Culture for some years. I remember the uncommonly large format of this collection, the high-quality paper, and the reproductions of minutely elaborated, fantastically figurative prints... with impressions of the naked breasts of women. The combined edition of Válek's early collections *Dotyky – príťažlivosť – nepokoj* (Touches – Attraction – Unrest, 1964, Slovenský spisovateľ) makes a much less spectacular and sumptuous impression; in many ways it reflects a certain "spirit of the time". The full-page illustrations by Marián Čunderlík created symbolic bridgings between the individual parts of the book. In contrast to Brunovský, Čunderlík did not set up parallel, lushly blooming worlds that sometimes seemed to grow

directly into the poems. He created collages from cuttings of existing photographic reductions, fragments of appropriated realities. Often the structure of a detail was important for him, sometimes in the effect of something drawn by hand, at other times as a fragment of a photographically reproduced structure in another context. However, he dissolved the rigour of the collage in smudges of painterly intervention which lent the particular images a specific atmosphere, a poetic fluidity. In Čunderlík's illustrations for Válek's collection, on the one hand there is a circular motif which resonates in a variety of forms: it is what the poet calls Luna, the symbol of eternal recurrence in cycles and a window into other dimensions. At the same time there is the figure of Woman, which appears, however, only in an identifiable silhouette, in echoes from cuttings of parts of other women, merging into a slim, long-haired ideal.

In the 1970s the poetry collections published by Slovenský spisovateľ began to stand out among other genres, because of their quality of elaboration and execution. Examples are *Skúška vodou* (Trial by Water, 1971) by the Swede Gunnar Ekelöf, and *Radar srdca* (Radar of the Heart, 1973) by the Russian poet Roberta Rozhdestvensky, illustrated by Anastasia Miertušová. Čunderlík, who was involved among other things in typography and graphic design, was their art editor. That this married couple shared a studio was not only helpful in terms of collaboration: it can be detected also e.g. in the choice of a harder base material for illustrations, and in the echoes of certain motifs and expressive means. The circle and its variations, typical of Miertušová's free geometric work, took on the function of a meditative counter-point to the text in the hypnotic groupings of concentric circles in the Ekelöf collection. Her appropriated or manually drawn structures in geometrical sections are themselves, like Ekelöf's poetry, an expression of something universal, rudimentary: granular, soft, smooth, liquid, hot and cold. Something we try to catch hold of, describe, sketch, but it is accessible only in fragments of experience, imprinted in a scrimmage of feelings which we attempt to grasp by means of the categories, the little patterns, that we can comprehend. Bearing within them the tension of opposites, which mirrors itself in the frayed contours of lines and circles of an imaginary perfection. Again, in the instance of Rozhdestvensky's book Miertušová worked with the liquid plastic mode of smudging, rippling it with cracked effects resembling bubbles on a dark undersea surface, from which figures and living creatures magically emerge.

Marián Čunderlík and Anastázia Miertušová were able to adapt their illustrations to the assignment in practically any literary genre. It was not only illustration for children's books that they mastered thoroughly. In

some cases their individual authorship, without knowing their work and specific titles of theirs, is difficult to distinguish at first glance. They remained bonded not only as family members and colleagues but also by certain aesthetics with a new potential, which had come to the forefront during the “golden sixties”. Čunderlík’s illustrations, similar to his free creations during the 1950s, concentrated first of all on the entirety of the figure; in this case, though, it was not the figure in exclusivity, but as rendered in a setting that depicted in narrative form the story of the particular literary works. Gradually, and in accordance with what he was illustrating, he began to experiment with a freer, more painterly execution of scenes; with their structures and impressions (especially in titles of Scandinavian prose); with decomposition and renewed assembly via collage and photomontage, as well as experimental typography. In certain registers he follows on visually from the legacy of the interwar avantgarde, especially in the use of photomontage, but without the revolutionary enthusiasm or the playful, erotic sensuality bubbling up from the subconscious; rather, he underlines existential feelings and the quest for human connections. One such example is Čunderlík’s dynamic, disturbed variation on the wrapper for Dürrenmatt’s *Sudca a jeho kat* (The Judge and His Hangman, 1969), where the pictorial surface is dominated by scraps of reproduced paintings on a monochrome background of signal colour. Precisely the combination of different photographic fragments made it possible to import a different type of creative imagery into the illustrations, a kind that operates with redefinition of the relationships between the whole and the details. Miertušová too used stylised, mainly female figures in her illustrations, with cut-outs of their symbolic features such as mouth and eyes, or a particular genre cliché (the rose, when it features, always has a blood-red colour). But again, her designs for *Dobrodružstvům Sherlocka Holmesa* (The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, 1966) elude any cliché of that time on how artworks ought to look if created by a female artist.

Miroslava Urbanová

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(introduction to the exhibition
Anastázia Miertušová, Marián Čunderlík — Family Affair,
THIS! is the Gallery, 15. 4. – 15. 7. 2021)

Ladislav Nesselman (1927 - 1987)

He studied at the Prague Fine Arts Academy under Profs. Karol Minář and Miloslav Hollý. He provided the illustrations for over thirty books — for example

for *Do videnia, Zuzanka!* (Bye, Bye Little Susie) by Hana Zelinová and *Jazmínko v krajine klamárov* (Jazmin in the Land of Liars) by Gianni Rodari. His work has been repeatedly recognized in the competition for Czechoslovakia's Most Beautiful Books – in 1974, 1977, 1984, and 1985. In 1977, he received the highest Slovak award for Children's Illustration, the Ľudovít Fulla Prize.

He lived and worked in Bratislava. The peak of his illustration creation occurred in the 1970, when he specialized in books for those children who were just learning to read – he taught them to connect the imaginations in their heads with the letters on the paper (therefore he often made use of layering and collage). The way in which he gained them was by activating their associative abilities. He suppressed himself, he adapted to the simplicity of the text, stuck to the details, did not add his own interpretations. Really: if a ribbon was white in the text, so it was too in the picture.

Pavel Maňka (1929 - 2015)

Do you know what buoyancy is? It is the physical phenomenon thanks to which a body – for example an airplane – can travel in a direction opposite to that dictated by gravitational force. Upwards. To the stars. To faraway worlds. It can overcome that force that pulls it downwards time and again, can feel it rippling around, cutting through thin air.

Does that look complicated to you? And moreover – you wonder what it has in common with the illustrations of Pavel Maňka? You look at them and you have a desire to fly. This process, like when a plane picks up speed on the runway and it seems like nothing is happening for the longest time until at one instant it breaks away from the earth, lifts off up into the sky and everything – those thousands of previous movements – comes together and starts to make sense.

Have a look at the miniatures that he has illustrated – really, how else can that colouring book for small children or prefaces to propaganda materials be called – and also at the objects he has created, at the formulas, sketches, notes, transcriptions, and corrections, and you realize how deep that Bratislava artist thought in order for his subtle works to appear. Imagine him, how he spends hours calculating some movement in his illustrations just so that he hit everything precisely, so that the constructions held together. How he treated them, with careful, predictable care, when the author saw “a step forward”. When he calculates with the viewer's

experience, when he literally 'creates' the feeling that decides as to whether we stand before his works for a while or if we quickly turn away from them. In other words, if his concentrate of shape, colour and stylization is working.

We know that it's a little voyeuristic.

We are uncovering the processes that usually remain hidden in the intimate spaces of studios, and even more, without the artist being able in any way to correct or add to our deductions, to say "Stop. That is not what I meant by that." Really, we know so little about him. The art historian Naďa Kančevová wrote about Pavel Maňka that he was: "a closed-in solitaire, an experimenter and a constructor, a pioneer of the abstract-geometric tendency in Slovakia." So he lived as if closed into the space of his art for a long time, almost twenty years with a minimum of open, public contacts on the artistic scene, without participating at exhibitions and dialoguing with other artists and artists among the studios on Pohronská Street in Bratislava's New Town and the Vajnory airport. Thus came into existence an intensive work of art.

Every expression, every line in the process of his creation took on its maximum significance and importance. It is clear that for Maňka himself it was a constant seeking for the harmony of the whole, and also an expression of some type of approach to life or the expression of an internal conviction tending towards transcendence.

The idea of space flights, the world of faraway roads and of cognition never however became a mark of his work. The world of cosmonauts and aviators was not just a reflex (in the final analysis, a good number of fine artists undertook this theme as playful fiction). His world was constructions, plans, models, beyond which the desire for knowledge is discernible. The cosmos and aviation were only means to a deeper reflecting on the essence of our world. Eagerness, which is the mover of knowledge. In everything that you see in a gallery – these illustrations, objects, registers, drawings and paintings – there is discernible his desire to fly. But not ordinary: "If I could rise up, over the mountains, over the valleys, I would look down..." He conceived the subject differently. More than the flight itself, he enjoyed the knowledge, the searching, the finding how it all works, everything that allows us to overcome gravity and remain "high". He takes apart the mechanism and puts it together again, adds and subtracts elements, simplifies. Round and round.

He did few illustrations, he remained just a few folders, illustrations for books with a more or less technical content, and the colouring book *Letište* (Airport, colouring book – Mladé letá, Bratislava 1964)

and *Spoj Projekt* (Connect Project, Bratislava 1970), or the book *Zrnko, otvor sa!* (Seed, Open Up!, Vladimír Ferko, Mladé letá, Bratislava 1964). Apart from all this there remained many sketches, containing reflections on someone else's texts. In the period 1969 to 1989, in the period of Normalization and post-Normalization, he retreated to his studio on Pohronská Street in Bratislava's New Town, and acted minimally in public. The art historian Ľuba attributes to him "temporal primacy in the turn to abstract-geometric morphology in Slovak painting after the Second World War."

In addition, the art historian Ľuba Belohradská describes Maňka's fixation with flying in her text: "The Unnoticed Bratislava designer Pavel Maňka vs. the (oblivious) curator Jiří Valoch" (*Jazdec*, 1/2012), when she quotes from their final conversation his words: "Flying in the air provides an unreal experience of space, and suddenly you begin to see completely differently." What did "completely differently" mean for him?

Pavel Maňka completed the Industrial Arts secondary school and in the years 1951 – 1956 studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in the studio of prof. Ján Želibský. He was a member of the Club of Concretists and from 1961 took part in several non-public exhibitions of abstract creation. After 1991 he again began to exhibit in collective exhibitions. He had his first solo exhibition in 2012 at the Cyprián Majerník Gallery in Bratislava.

Ida Želinská

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(introduction to the exhibition Airport, THIS! is the Gallery, 9. 2. – 27. 4. 2023)

Otokar Bachorík ^(1933 - 2018)

He was a graphic artist, a graphic designer and also a textile artist. He studied in the Department of Industrial Graphics and Decorative Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. He worked as an artist at Bratislava's House of Technology and was later the artistic editor at the *Smena* and *Mladé letá* book publishers. We can find his illustrations in for example the book by Kveta Dašková and Jan Pantoflíček, *Sun in a Can* (1963), as well as in many colouring books.

Ján Švec (1930 - 2017)

Usually, we harbour certain ideas about art: someone invents something, it gets recorded into memory (or art theory) and so it becomes common practice. One of such ideas is the notion that scientific illustration should be of marginal interest of theorists, not much reflected on in specialized magazines or the history of art. There even arises a question: Why should it be? It is a craft, not an art. A skill without fantasy. To be sure, some fantasizing or overstepping boundaries would even inflict harm in this field, jeopardize the essential exactness. So why would anyone study something so obvious as the illustrations in encyclopaedias: animals, plants, stones, bones, buildings... drawn with micrometre precision? Who would compare the details and authors of these illustrations?

And yet... there is something more in them. Otherwise, we would not remember how fascinated we were by them as kids. When we studied the veins on tree leaves, the footprints of animals, the bodies of prehistoric organisms or the patterns on butterfly wings and colours on fish scales.

Just imagine, that someone had to spend hours constructing those miniature and detailed photographic images. Someone had to spend hours studying, scrutinizing, comparing the specimen structures, searching for the most suitable spectrum to turn 3D into 2D.

It meant a lot of hard work for little fame.

Let's be honest: Have you ever thought about the process of making a scientific illustration? How all the images you see in encyclopaedias, scientific publications and magazines are composed and shaped? Have you ever imagined how long the illustrator had to observe the object from above, from below, from each side...? A sketchy drawing based on the first point of view would not be able to hold the reader's attention and would tire them with dozens of similarly looking animals and plants. Have you ever imagined how tiresome such drawing process must be?

When drawing hundreds of animals and plants the illustrator is caught in a slow exercise: at first beat, bend above the paper drawing a few lines, at second beat, turn to study the specimen through a magnifying glass or microscope, at third beat, bend again... The tinier the real objects, the finer the details must be and the more turning it means, followed by hours of layering the pencil sketches, colouring with aniline paints and contouring with ink.

Technical and scientific illustration does not address exclusively the technicians and scientists. Its scope expands towards laypersons, especially children. Therefore, it should be done in a way that

captures attention, piques curiosity and strengthens the will to explore.

The story of Ján Švec is, in its way, a reflection of more than fifty years of scientific illustration.

And it is a humble story, as you can read further.

For many years (1956 – 1991) he worked as an art director in Mladé letá publishing house for children's literature where he supervised illustrations of other artists and at the same time illustrated encyclopaedias.

He began his career illustrating the worlds of fairy tales (*Belasý balík* by Georgiy Bryantsev in 1960 among others), but before long he switched almost entirely to scientific illustration. Many of the encyclopaedias (dealing with birds or butterflies of Slovakia, with insects or aquarium fish) have been handed from one generation to the next.

We take those books for granted and therefore are not aware of their virtuosity. Acrylic paints, ink, watercolours, pencil... he worked with many techniques.

And he was truly skilled.

It is really important to make the animals and plants interesting for young readers, not as static as in a glass display. It was necessary to disrupt the boring, almost uniform stylizations. Sometimes all it needed was to change the position of an insect from static to dynamic pose, move one of its legs, turn it slightly to the right or left, add a scratch to an otherwise perfect elytra, and suddenly the whole work – the whole book – is attractive and makes the reader think: "Oh, it looks alive, I can see it crawl, raise its head. I can see the bird trying to swallow (an anatomically precise) fly it holds in its beak."

Ján Švec always stayed at the periphery, but kept producing honest, pure craft, direct in its expression, understandable, conservative in a positive sense, kept within clear boundaries.

However, he was not only an illustrator.

His expression in books and on paintings differs only on the first sight, although a question may arise: What does the "constructive art" (as he called it) and photographically precise depiction of the world around us have in common? The connection stands in the transformation, constant shaping of the basics, of the first idea. He considers his free art "rational, however, if we forget this definition, its variedness offers a great range of emotional experience."

We can see it when looking at the hundreds of his illustrations.

The encyclopaedic books may be of use "for a limited time": often they come out of the shelf for a short while when the adults and kids enjoy exploring together what exactly they saw on the walk, studying the tiny differences, learning the names of the living creatures. Or when the children trace the

illustrations on the tracing paper, imprinting them on their memory. And then the books wait on the shelves for the next kid.

And when that comes the joy of exploring is just as big.

Let's take a look.

On the walls of the THIS! is the Gallery there are lots of animals hanging (no kidding), all created by Ján Švec throughout almost forty years that he illustrated various encyclopedias and scientific publications. You can admire his miniature painting, his precision in comparison with the original creatures borrowed from the Natural History Museum in Bratislava. Use our magnifying glass and observe the details.

There are swarms of butterflies, schools of fish and flocks of birds waiting for you in our gallery.

Ida Želinská

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*(introduction to the exhibition As if Live,
THIS! is the Gallery, 25. 11. 2021 – 10. 2. 2022)*

STOPY Edition

1964 — 1990

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Vladimír Machaj

Teodor Schnitzer

Juraj Deák

František Šešták

Jozef Cesnak

Dušan Polakovič

Zdeno Brázdil

Marián Oravec

¶

STOPY Edition

Such a simple design - black and white illustration at the top, title STOPY written four times at the bottom, a coloured stripe in the centre with the title of the booklet and the author's name. And yet! They couldn't be missed in libraries or bookstores. In 27 years, 130 of them were published, the first in 1964, the last in 1990, in editions of tens of thousands. Cowboy stories, Indians stories, historical stories, detective stories, science fiction... low brow, no great art. But they were read.

Maybe the illustrations themselves weren't that great, and neither were the stories - plus they were ruined by cheap printing and poor paper. But they had "something" in them. Some kind of charge, power, energy. They pulled the attention. And not only then, they stayed in the memory for a long time, some of them passed through generations. They were reflected in the time in which they were created, like in a mirror.

Just go through the statistics and look at what was being published. The earliest - in the 1960s it was adventure stories from the Wild West, or stories by British, American and French authors. As the so-called "normalisation" of society progressed, in the 1970s, something changed: although they were still stories with suspense (thrill?), suddenly Soviet, Slovenian or Polish authors were writing about the Wild West. But the so-called "classics" – Jack London, Alexandre Dumas or Agatha Christie, whom readers knew from textbooks – began to appear. At the beginning of the 1980s, Polish and Bulgarian, and later Slovak science fiction arrived.

We tried to find those illustrations. We didn't always succeed. Paper is a fragile medium, it wrinkles, it gets soggy, it becomes stale. Many of the originals were destroyed, lost. With a few exceptions, they are not in gallery collections, there was no one to borrow them from for the exhibition; many of the authors are simply no more. So some of the STOPY have literally disappeared. We searched for almost three years before more than a hundred works were reunited on the walls of the galleries. Each one has a story – the publishing one, the technical one, the artistic one.

The most, 11 books, illustrated by Teodor Schnitzer (the whole pentalogy about the *Leather Stocking* (and almost all the May books), followed by Juraj Deák with 10 books (e.g. 7 books were illustrated by František Hübel (among others, the first volume of the *Bastion of Civilization* edition), 6 books were illustrated by František Šesták, 5 books each by Peter Klúčik, Ján Trojan and Ondrej Zimka, 4 books each by Marián Minarovič and Teodor Rotrekl, 3 books each by Zdeno Brázdil, Jozef Cesnak, Svetozár Králik, Vladimír Machaj, Naďa Rappensbergerová-Jankovičová,

Karel Teissig and Adrián Zalay, 2 books each by Otokar Bachorík, Peter Cpin, Jozef Jaňák, Osvald Klapper, František Kudláč Jr., Ľubomír Longauer, Marián Oravec, Dušan Polakovič, Gabriel Štrba, Ján Valach, Jaromír Vraštil and Ján Zelenák, Peter Augustovič, Róbert Brun, Miroslav Cipár, Ján Dressler, Stanislav Dusík, Jozef Haščák, Ľudovít Ilečko, Václav Junek, Ľubomír Kellenberger, Martin Kellenberger, Dagmar Kočišová, Ján Lebiš, Milan Lebiš, Milan Lehmden, Ján Lengyel, Milan Mazanec, Marián Mudroch, Dušan Pacúch, Ever Púček, Veronika Rónaiová, Dušan Stopiak, Juraj Šutovský, Alexej Vojtášek and Tatiana Žitňáková.

Five books had no illustrator given or were without illustrations.

So remember here - in the gallery - the feeling you had when you were little and you read the whitish books with the title STOPY. That feeling of adventure, of when you believed those stories really happened.

Ida Želinská

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(introduction to the exhibition The STOPY Phenomenon, THIS! is the Gallery, 7. 12. 2017 – 2. 2. 2018)

Vladimír Machaj (1929 - 2016)

Please, see page No. 50.

Teodor Schnitzer (1933 - 2003)

Please, see page No. 55.

Juraj Deák (1935 - 2012)

First he finished the School of Industrial Arts, in 1963 he continued his studies at the Fine Arts Academy, in Vincent Hložník's graphic creation and illustration studio. He illustrated more than half a hundred books or in editions of STOPY or in so-called 'ro-docs' with adventure themes from May or Cooper, or the books of Jack London, Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson, then later sci-fi themes, for example Jerzy Broskiewicz. He belonged among those illustrators who don't stand out, are not predators, don't come up with anything new... but nonetheless, without them we cannot imagine (nor remember) stories that we read, or better at a certain age, swallow, and we need to remember

the feelings – fear, relief. His illustrations, for the most part black and white, bear a distinctive mark that shows that above all he was a graphic artist: he worked with a precisely calculated straight line, had a strong character stylization, and was economical in expression.

František Šesták (1935 - 2004)

Studied at the School of Applied Arts in Zlín under the supervision of prof. Stanislav Mikulášтик, later at the Academy of Fine Arts under prof. Jan Mudroch. Illustration came to the fore in his work in the 1960s and 1970s - in that time he created 56 book works, mainly illustrations with western, adventure, and Indian themes. Alongside this, he worked as a portraitist and muralist.

He often changed the way he worked, even within a single book, adapting the form of his illustrations to the plot of the stories: he moved from full-colour paintings to pen-and-ink drawings or so-called brush-drawings. The heroes of his illustrations are historically "accurate", embedded in reality, literally from the buttons on their clothes to the shapes of their swords or the ornamentation of their rifles. Most important, however, is the stylization of their expression, the precise, almost photographic capturing of the emotion in the action.

Jozef Cesnak (1936 - 2021)

Please, see page No. 61.

Dušan Polakovič (1950 - 2016)

studied first at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and then at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava under Albín Brunovský. He was awarded the degree of DOCTOR HUMORIS CAUSA at Malostranská Beseda restaurant in Prague in 1985. He was active in illustration, painting, free graphics and satirical drawing. In one of the interviews he gave to the Slovak daily Pravda he said: "A world I prefer is one based on humor. I look for it in reality and I draw it." He illustrated not only books with prominent storylines – such as the Slovak edition of *Die seltsamen Abenteuer des Marco Polo* by Willi Meinck, *Dve záhady* by Peter Stoličný, or *Tracy's Tiger* by William Saroyan, but also textbooks –

of German and natural science for both regular and special needs students.

Zdeno Brázdil ⁽¹⁹⁵⁵⁾

Studied graphics at the secondary School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava, and later at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava under Oto Lupták. Since graduation, he has been producing paintings, free graphics and illustrations, and in 1994-1997 and 2003-2015 worked as a university teacher at the Department of Art Education of the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava. He illustrated adventure books for younger readers published as part of the cult Slovak STOPY imprint – these included the Slovak edition of *Crazy Horse* by Walter Püschel, *Kolónia Lambda Pí* by Jozef Repko, *Operácia stonožka* by Jožo Horvát, but also books for grownup readers such as *Nemé ucho, hluché oko* by Peter Jaroš.

Marián Oravec ⁽¹⁹⁵⁸⁾

Studied at the secondary School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava. He went on to study at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava in the years 1978-1984, at the Department of Book Illustration and Free Graphics under Albín Brunovský. At the beginning of his career, he drew comics. He currently produces paintings, drawings, illustrations, and graphics. He spent several years working abroad, primarily in Australia. He has provided illustrations for over twenty children's books, such as the Slovak editions of *The Mystery of the Shrinking House* by William Arden, or *Side-Effect* by Raymond Hawkey. He was also one of the illustrators for the cult STOPY imprint of the publishing house Mladé Leta, focused on adventure fiction for younger readers – e.g. *Tajomstvá troch strelených* by Jozef Repko and the Slovak edition of *Orzowei* by Alberto Manzi.

Vladimír Machaj

Viera Gergeľová

Ján Lebiš

Irena Tarasová

Viera Bombová

Rudolf Fila

Teodor Schnitzer

Blanka Votavová

Albín Brunovský

Miroslav Cipár

Jan Trojan

Jozef Cesnak



Vladimír Machaj (1929 - 2016)

I looked on him – a man of years. And he looked at the illustrations. He approached them, took off his glasses, put them on again, stepped back a couple of steps. Minutes pass. “Imagine it,” he says, “I was about twelve, I was reading Tarzan. And suddenly there were eight pages without printing. Completely blank, clear paper. If there hadn’t been the illustrations to keep me in with the story, I’d probably have gone mad.” And again he bent over and studied the drawing. And then it struck me that if this illustrator – Vladimír Machaj – hadn’t painted ‘so precisely’ if he had not subordinated himself to the text, hadn’t been faithful to it, if he had not denied himself and put in first place the image of E. R. Burroughs, the details, the sentences, the situations, then that man would have passed more quickly in front of the illustrations, stopping just for a moment in front of those others that hung in the gallery.

Hey.

We can regard Vladimír Machaj as an old school author. His illustrations often bring to mind stylized photographs – so carefully prepared and worked out to the smallest details. The reader need not search ‘what the illustrator wanted to add to the story with them’ – he looks and he sees.

‘Honest illustration’ right, that’s what the one who created it would call it. Expressive, an easily memorable stylization of the characters, the simple outlines of their bodies, readable characteristics – the good are good-looking, the bad guys are ugly. Precise and well-shaped details. It is always delicate, it never crosses the border to expressive expression, not even when the text is rough.

But still!

The seeming slowness, the quiet, the ordinariness of the pictures that sidelined the author when he stood in the crowd before the rougher, the more expressive, was immediately lost when the reader finds himself alone with the book.

He always knows that he can rely on the author, that with him the story will flow smoothly, it will be filled out and yet space will be left for the situations to write themselves into his memory.

That’s no small thing.

Vladimír Machaj creates with details, figuratively working as a nail the reader can hang their visual experiences on – there remain in the memory the large eyes of the heroes from the children’s books, the stretched shadows from the fables, and the filigreed details from the myths.

Sure, he has also tried the rougher forms – we see them most often in foreign editions or in exotic tales. As time went by however, he simplified his style, returned to the earthiness, to his pen or brush stroke

as the basis of legibility, “rendered himself” not only in the composition of black-and-white surfaces, but also in the dissolving of colours into a special spectrum of dozens of shades.

He is able to change – but again – only in dependence on the text.

Try to look at these pictures.

That just looking at them is enough – like the man in the gallery who was incapable of moving away from Tarzan. And enjoy their grandeur, the bravura with which they were created, and the harmony which they exude.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition *The 2.5 × 4 m Studio, THIS! is the Gallery*, 9. 4. – 26. 6. 2015)

Viera Gergelová (1930 - 2004)

Studied at the Academy of Applied Arts with Peter Dillinger, later at the Fine Arts Academy in Prague, and finally at the Fine Arts Academy in Bratislava. She has been exhibited in over twenty countries and during her career was awarded many prizes for her graphic work. She managed to blend artistic mastery with illustrations discernable to her audience, whether child or adult. In each of her books she is ‘different, her painting is ‘chameleonesque,’ subordinated to the text, merged with it, never disturbing for the sake of her own creation. She was able to balance the saturation of colours, and from them form a kind of ‘haze’. She knew how to give memorable faces to the human or animal heroes of the stories, fixing them as familiar and friendly in the reader’s memory.

Ján Lebiš (1931 - 1996)

You giggle. Literally. You’re going through a gallery (or through a book) from illustration to illustration, you have a look and you feel good, your diaphragm vibrates, the corners of your mouth are pulled into a smile of their own accord. You feel jolly. You feel hot. That – this feeling – is provoked in you by those little round, touchingly clumsy, colourful figures of people and animals in pictures for young children. And then you continue for a few steps (or a few pages) and things are completely different. You turn the pages and feel the concentrated power the strokes were made with – either with a brush or with a chisel. You

look at the pictures – large, passionate stories in books for adults, and you feel, well, like their heroes. Exalted. Proud. Eager. Or completely at the bottom. Hopeless. And then repeated, as if you had taken a breath and regained your strength. Hey. Ján Lebiš is not just the (author) chameleon, who in almost every book changes colour, technique or form, to such a degree that you might not know him. He's not interested in hard inputs, he doesn't ask who he's working for or if it won't be too complicated for the children and too trivial for the adults. As the story goes, so goes the illustration. He adapts his atmosphere not only in terms of stylization (put what – where – in which direction in the picture), but also as regards technique. In light tales, in fairy stories, in humorous anecdotes, he chooses the soft - most often gouache, egg tempera, watercolour, while in the dramatic ones he goes with force - with a chisel into the linen or the wood or the butcher's board. Where the text allows, he inserts a hint of folk art or classic art: an ornament in a chronically familiar shape – for example a piece of folk dress, embroidery thread, industrial elements, a typical weapon – such that when the reader notices it, he says: "I know this, I've seen this somewhere". And all the same the illustrator does not surrender to the story; he remains true to himself. Distinctive, in a multitude of others, doesn't matter if in a laughing position or in a sad one. With an almost geometric precision, every picture has the concept worked out to the fine details. The small area of a part of the page of a book where he has to place the picture does not restrict him; it only forces him to make it more dense, so that nothing is lost from the story. He often creates a kind of crater from figural compositions where the storyline turns in a gyre. He leaves no free place, his figures don't need to catch their breath, it's enough for them to separate themselves from the text with a strong contour, with full surfaces. He has had the opportunity to illustrate great works: Boccaccio, Villon, Dostoevsky, London, Swift. And also the luck to belong to a good generation of illustrators who took their creation very seriously – Teodor Schnitzer, Mirko Hanák, Albín Brunovský and others: when they started, they were ridding themselves of the fear from the war or the scarcities (not only materially) of the 1950s, and appreciating the massive production of the publishing houses, fulfilling themselves, being part of a good product, then enjoying the seeming freedom of the sixties and its ethos, that strange power in the tension they carried, in spite of the changes in society. Hey. In the illustration work by Ján Lebiš there is something irritating, something spontaneous, almost physical, passionate something that halts the readers, that prevents them from simply sliding their eyes over the pages of the

book, but rather forces them to repeat the already read in their feelings. And it is precisely this rawness, this intensity of gesture that exceeds the standard, that becomes exceptional. As is the illustration of the story, so is the trace in the reader's memory.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition *Must be fun for the kids, THIS! is the Gallery*, 16. 2. – 28. 4. 2017)

Irena Tarasová (1931)

In her illustrations she expressed herself in a distinctly painterly way – she accented colourity and decorativeness. Her original work developed in three stages definable by artistic technique. In the first stage of her illustration work, she concentrated on the collage creative process – an artistic technique for combining various materials. In the pictorial composition of an illustration, she was concerned with fantasy, the idea of the symbol and colour freedom. And so emerged her original illustrations for children's books of verse. Such illustrating of poetry for children has the task of giving the verses an equivalent visual form and emphasizing the poetic dimension. The reason lies in the fact that the poetry and the image have a deep and intensive connection. Such consonance is presented in Tarasova's pictures for the book of verse by Ludmila Podjavorinská *Už ho vezú* (They are Taking Him) from 1965. The publishing of this book was a successful editing act, since by 1988 its sixth re-edition had appeared. Many adult people remember this as their favourite childhood reading or recitation due to its very amusing yet meaningful verses. The book radiates pleasure, ease, the love of the authoress for children, all enhanced by charming artistic "decoration". In this book she gives proof that even in such smaller dimensions, illustration can be imaginatively rich and stimulating. Calm and simple motifs, simple shapes close to a child's mentality, and the poetry content make the work varied and technically unique. The collage technique consists of a precise morphology and a sensitive combination of paper, textiles and gouache, with original imagination and fantasy driving the compositions. The typology of animal and child heroes has, in the simplified stylization, the elements of playfulness and a smiling well-being. Artistically, the pictures are impressively stylized while remaining easily readable for children. Tarasa's interpretation, and her distinctive poetic imagery, enriches the text with her own new dimensions.

Her style is an artistic parallel to the text of modern storytelling, consisting of children's stories and adventures with a significant dose of fantasy, poetry and humour. The books that the artist has created in the collage technique give witness to her rich fantasy, creativity, playfulness and sense for pictorial poetry; alongside the collage programs of other illustrators (Viera Kraicova, Alojz Klimo, Běla Kolčáková) she has given her works a characteristic trademark and originality. From the 1970s, Madame Tarasová has been oriented to drawing, of which she already had creative experience in the illustration of literature. Irena Tarasová has created for children a unique body of illustration work over a wide scale of writing. She has sensitively balanced her expression with the determining signs of child perceptiveness, on the basis of which she has built a structure of illustration within the range of its means and colourity. The nature of her talent is determined by two characteristics: fantasy and poetics. And in conclusion, my experience – You need to look incredibly long at the collage illustrations of Irena Tarasová.

Gita Kordošová

*(introduction to the exhibition As if cut out of a book,
THIS! is the Gallery, 31. 1. – 25. 4. 2019)*

Viera Bombová⁽¹⁹³²⁾

She created her most intense works in the 1970s, when she joined in with the ballads and folk tales genre and found her unique way to illustrate them. At the same time, she mentally harmonized her illustrator's expressivity with the modernist stream that she found so attractive, and which influenced her greatly. She created in such a way that words were not necessary for her illustrations, she never followed a narrative track – working not from the story, but from feeling: this was brought out for the reader by the stylization of the characters (unhappy in convulsion, sleeping in relaxation), the muted deep colouring, or the layering of a number of backgrounds one on top of the other, often composed not just from things and shapes, but often from human or animal figures. She was expressively inspired by folk art, and wove into her works themes from folk costumes, from lace or embroidery, even from gingerbread moulds. In her technique she also included elements more typical for naïve art: blue-printing, batik, frottage. Never however did she slide into superficial pleasant simplicity; she always gave her work the punch

of her time's contemporaneity (and today, timelessness). As gentle as she was in her technique, she also knew how to use power in her expression, letting her figures struggle, meander through stories, literally fight for the reader's attention – her work was simply intense. In fact, it still is – you look at it and without knowing why, her work pulls on you like a magnet.

Ida Želinská

Rudolf Fila (1932 - 2015)

studied at the School of Applied Arts and Crafts in Brno, then at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava under Ján Mudroch. He spent thirty years as a teacher at the secondary School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava. After 1990, he headed the studio of free painting at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design. Among his illustrations are those for the Slovak edition of *The Irish Sagas* and *Folk-Tales* by Eileen O'Faolain, *Milovanie v husej koži* by Miroslav Válek, *My Cousin Rachel* by Daphne du Maurier, or the *Hawaiian Myths*.

Teodor Schnitzer (1933 - 2003)

Miloš Kopták once asked me if I knew anything about the illustrator, Teodor Schnitzer. Since I have been working as literary editor at the *Slnečko* magazine for a number of years, I always thought I knew something about those involved in literary creation for children and youth. But this name was unfamiliar to me. I asked my older colleagues, who long ago worked in the *Mladé letá* publishing house, but somehow got no answers. Then Miloš got in touch again, and only then did I realize that Teodor Schnitzer was indeed part of my youth. It was enough when he gave me a few book titles this mysterious artist had illustrated. There popped into my head black and white images that drew me into the mysterious world of Indians, of dangerous yet noble adventurers, attacks by wild animals, and untamed open nature. I was incredibly embarrassed when I fully realized that in the time of my youth the illustrator was only the small name in a print that I rarely paid attention to. It was like the author of the text automatically took the credit for this added value to the illustrated story. It was only later that I consciously searched out the name of the person who suggestively upgraded for me the atmosphere of an unforgettable book. I went to my mother's,

where I still have my childhood library. I went through the whole shelf with editions of *STOPY*, *Winnetou*, *Sons of the Great Bear*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, the *Coopers*. In disbelief I looked at the pictures from which the stories that paraded before me emerged like films, because they shared an astonishing dynamic – Indians canoeing, and really for their lives, a bear emerging from the crackling brush and charged at the terrified hunters, the woodsmen and their weary horses making their way through the menacing rock pass. There was authentic movement in the pictures – the leaves trembled on the trees, the wind creating eddies of air for them, a broken branch fell to the ground, a horse stumbled as a loose stone rolled away from under its hooves. These were not just books, they were a piece of my personified life that I gratefully accepted from my older brothers, fans of adventure stories. Among their books I also found *Robotníkov mora* (*Workers of the Sea*). With them I struggled on the stormy sea where the waves would drag me into their watery hell and then lift me up to the heavens. I hadn't believed that a picture could have such power, that it moves in the intentions of my mental impulses, because in such circumstances we actually do live – The workers of everyday life. If someone put so much energy into the pictures, how much he must have in himself?! How far does our soul transcend us, if it is not dependent on the space created for it by our body and the environment in which it moves?! The roughness and the dynamics, but also the fragility of details in their most precise subtlety, speak of the totality of the artist's work, which is a true image of their inner life. I also discovered the paradoxical tenderness and softness in the illustrations in some leporellos of Mária Rázusová Martáková that I discovered recently when I was moving. *Môj macík* (*My Pussy*) and *Zvieratníček* (*The Zoo*) whispered something to me that reminded me vaguely of Jiří Trnka, and with surprise I read the name of the illustrator – Teodor Schnitzer. When I looked at the enlarged illustration from *The Last of the Mohicans*, it was like I was seeing Chinese calligraphics in which people with loaded horses travel through mountain gorges, a cold mist rises from the mountains, and plants send out their fragrant secrets, dampening the harbinger of the intensifying fear of an unknown danger.

Lubica Kepštová

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(introduction to the exhibition
The man from the wild east,
THIS! is the Gallery, 10. 9. – 27. 11. 2015)

Blanka Votavová (1933 - 2018)

She worked in illustration, free graphics, drawing and art protis. Her portfolio includes more than fifty books, mostly for younger children. Many of them are inspired by folk ornaments from different parts of Slovakia. Her calm, subdued, almost meditative works can be found in the book *On Three Letters* by Jef a Besi (1962), or *Seven Hearts*, 1969 by Jozef Cíger Hronský, Beniuc Mihai's story under the title *My Itaka*, 1961), in Maria Topolska's *The Blue-White World* (1974), in Stefan Žáry's *How We Reach the Sun* (1979) and Benno Pludra's *The Four-Legged Sailor* (1964), or in Octav Pancu-Iași's *The Great News of the Little Boy* (1967), Eugène Guillevic's poems (1972), among others.

Albín Brunovský (1935 - 1997)

was awarded multiple times at the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava. He was a long-time professor at the AFAD in Bratislava. In 1967, he co-founded the international exhibition of original illustrations for children's books, the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava, wherein he also founded and led the UNESCO – BIB workshop for illustrators from developing countries. A. Brunovský represents the imaginative mode of illustration. Characteristic of his work is a sense of detail and minute drawing, which results in ornamentation that often creates a decorative image. These elements, rich with his characteristic flair, amplify the literary qualities of the works that are in this way turned into treasured adornments of the bookcases they occupy. The artist provided illustrations for more than a hundred books by both domestic and foreign authors, and held around 150 solo exhibitions in his home country and abroad, with his works likewise found in collections across the borders. There is one point of contention with regard to his oeuvre: although his works were ostensibly aimed at children, they feel more as if they were intended for grownups, especially in terms of their often serious and solemn character. Although ornamentalization, as seen, for instance, in his characteristic large lady hats evoking ornate baskets full of flowers, fruits, and entangled human bodies, although they do give a both ornamental and amusing impression, they are ultimately given a certain extraordinary dignity. The expressions of the characters do not make them appealing, they are often rather sullen, stylized, deformed, with perhaps a subtle hint of caricature yet hardly likable or attractive at first glance. Whereas the faces are often

deliberately contorted, there is generosity, mystery, imagination, air, and excitement in the labyrinths of details of floral and human anatomies. The artist would frequently evoke frightful feelings and imagery, yet on the other hand create whole “meadows” of ornamental scenes, poetic, tender, and brightly colorful. He was a master of detail, the king of minutia, all of which, however, had their own developments, meanings, backstories, logic, but above all the charm of mystery and dream, which required a richly layered imagination, and a penchant for playfulness in the silence of his studio. It was from there that he, through his illustrations, would send his beautifully “weird” messages out to the world, across distances, to the souls of his young audiences. Maybe the quality of his work can only be wholly appreciated once they reach an older age and are better equipped to grasp the context encrypted in the images. There is nevertheless a lasting impression, because his illustrations are impossible to forget. Apart from them, the artist also produced graphics, paintings on wood, fragmentary paintings on mirrors, which, much as his illustrations, reflected his exquisite eye for color, sense of fine detail, and his supremely human sensibility.

Barbara Brathová

Miroslav Cipár ^(1935 - 2021)

You recognize them at first glance – you look at the picture in the book and you say to yourself, “these illustrations are – so Cipáresque”. And it’s all the same if you are looking at those the author framed with various black contours or with a ‘wired line’, or the round, richly coloured areas he joined onto the figures, or at a rhythmic typo, or at the elements of undetermined shapes that look like a puzzle, even so they still wave and wonder of wonders, the eye of the viewer sees something very very concrete. Miroslav Cipár is simply “like that”. He creates, which means he draws, paints, writes, assembles, engraves, anything at all. And there is so much of him, everywhere. He creates so much that it is as if he doesn’t sleep – at the same time he moves from illustrations to logos, to objects sometimes, and then back. He entered into the world of paintings and pictures with his worthy contemporaries: Albín Brunovský, Ján Lebiš, Viera Bombová, Jozef Cesnak, Viera Gergelová and Teodor Schnitzer. Each of them brought something novel to Slovak book illustration. He brought humour. And levity. He never overburdened the reader (and nor does he today). He doesn't impose his idea of

what the heroes of the stories should look like (on the other hand, they very often resemble each other), He draws them straddling the line between reality and abstraction, so they can be adopted in one's fantasy. His characters are constantly in motion: they run, they jump, sometimes they stumble, trip and fall over their own feet, now they carry things, then they lose something, they are always doing something. He creates in such a way that he is playing with the story. He stops infrequently, for example when he draws from folk ornamentation, but even then he doesn't dwell on their origins but is rather inspired by the tempo, by their repeated motifs. Still he doesn't draw, doesn't insert, doesn't encrypt into his own creation what has already been created. He draws "his own and new" shapes, and rarely makes use of the angle or the edge, but is rather drawn to a more cosy arch, to a wave, which he then stretches, twists, compresses, contorts, and thus hints to the reader how the story goes. He tells them: "Read more quickly! Stop – don't be in a rush, enjoy this text." However he colours sharply, often shining the entire illustration, and does not fear (truly) to mix yellow, solid blue, solid green, orange and pink, until the result is pure kitsch. It's hard to write about it. He doesn't want to be anchored in a single sentence, to be boxed in. He tells the one who wants to understand 'how he does it', keep searching: 'Is it this way? Or another way? What is there mostly in his creation?' One after the other you pick up his books, you write notes, and when you've finally found that connecting material and you want to relax... Bang! Suddenly nothing holds true. Maybe it comes down to the fact that Miroslav Cipár in his books does not change his basic instruments: a stroke with a brush, a marker, a pencil or pen. Like a chameleon however he does change his text, his contents, he looks for a unique, unchangeable face for each different author. Have a look. You will know these illustrations at first glance; they are 'so Cipáresque'.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition *So Cipáresque, THIS! is the Gallery*, 2. 5. – 31. 7. 2015)

Jan Trojan (1935 - 2000)

Working on diverse materials and literary genres, the illustrator seeks his own artistic expression. At the same time, he must respect certain given facts and the rules that follow from them. Those may be loose or unconstraining in fairytales or poetry, but

in historical texts especially they will be more stringent. Ján Trojan was enabled to work as an illustrator with diverse types of texts, which provided stimulation in the quest for a specific artistic language for an individual assignment. A considerable part of his work consists of illustrating literary works bound up with particular periods of history. Excellent examples of these are his illustrations to a double edition of neo-gothic novels, *The Monk* by M. G. Lewis and *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Ch. R. Maturin (1984), and *The Story of Joan of Arc* by A. Vantuch (1982). Working on a historical theme demanded a thorough preparation, with a study of contemporary realia, the principal settings, exteriors and interiors (especially architecture and clothing), military techniques and modes of battle, customs, ceremonies, etc. In all of this J. Trojan was extremely painstaking, and given that he had a love of history, for him it was the first phase of the work and a source of inspiration. His initial ideas appeared in the form of sketches and drawings, where he sought the basic shapes and forms. At the same time, he would pick out motifs which could express the essential emotions which the text evoked: fear, mystery, persecution, or horror. He refined his compositions in numerous variants, always tending towards a purity of form and an ascetic use of colour. In the illustrations to *The Story of Joan of Arc*, through a process of seeking minimalist form and brilliant colour he outlined the powerfully suggestive story in the form of magical dream visions. In several phases of elaboration of a particular motif (for example, a church interior) he sought a harmony of simplified form with translucent colour and a spiritual message. Both of these works of illustration are examples of his distinctive conception of painting, as a means of getting through to the spiritual message of the texts.

The artist took a different approach to painting in his illustrations to fairytales, which do not have a historical framing. Their texts enable a freer choice of artistic means, as well as narrative and situational elements. If the text did not exclude it, Trojan liked to use witty and humorous scenes, which might extend the scope of the text in terms of plot. We see this in the well-received fairytales *How the Egg Went Wandering* and *Red Riding Hood* (1977). He chose another approach in his captivating illustrations to M. Norton's *The Borrowers* (1972), whose witty text he used as decorative surfaces strewn with diverse flowers, trees and undergrowth, in the ornate style of medieval tapestries.

There is another fine set of illustrations in Gerald Durrell's contemporary fairytale *The Talking Parcel*, about children on an adventurous journey surviving various events. The preparatory drawings

for this book capture an atmosphere full of unexpected magical situations and enchantments.

Dozens of diverse ideas, registers, pictorial thoughts and reflections, giving rise to sketches, designs, many variants, and finally the definitive illustrations: such was the creative process typical of Ján Trojan's work. We know, said the theoretician Fedor Kriška, that "the most important thing in the creative process need not be the final expression, the result: rather, it may be the arduous search, the discovery, even the rejection of what has been discovered – that journey, full of adventure, in quest of knowledge".

Eva Trojanová

*(introduction to the exhibition Before I Say "Ready",
THIS! is the Gallery, 13. 2. – 10. 7. 2020)*

Jozef Cesnak ^(1936 - 2021)

Although he illustrated over 50 original and translated books, and in 2010 was awarded the Ľudovít Fulla prize for his contribution to the development of Slovak illustration art for children and youth, Jozef Cesnak essentially belongs among those "inconspicuous" illustrators whom art history and artistic criticism mention only sparingly. Nonetheless, an entire generation of present-day adults either consciously or unconsciously turn to his pictures when recalling their childhood memories. Illustrations for books with historic themes, Slovak and foreign short stories, adventure and detective genres, along with prose with themes from nature and factual literature, prevail in his portfolio. These are filled out with about two dozen school texts, books for younger readers and illustrations for children's magazines. The work of Jozef Cesnak bears the imprint of the characteristic attributes of the honest graphic craft of the Hložník school. Right from the start, these are dominated by clear and precise drawing with high attention to details. It was precisely this artistic 'craftmanship' that predetermined the author to the artistic representation of the aforementioned types of literary subjects. This is not surprising, since his vivid images convincingly bring to life literary stories and have the ability to move the viewer in space and time. Looking at the black and white drawings of Jozef Cesnak, we become aware of the special attractiveness and artistic quality of this part of the author's morphology is inspired by older forms of the book image. Similar to old pen drawings and engravings, in this author's

methodology they are characterised by a firm graphic order, by the placement of lines and a concentrated playing with shadow-tones. With these tools he builds plastic picture scenes, but is not satisfied with a static description of realities. He tries to convey the atmosphere of new, unknown worlds, emotionally bringing the viewer into the stories. Despite their traditionalist content, the illustrations for thematically and genre-diverse literary subjects operate with a wide scale of poetic qualities – now quiet, at other times with a romantic, balladic or dramatic undertone. This is helped by the variation of the expressive values of his signature, and his creative exploration of the issue of figurative composition. This artist was a master of the spectrum of the expressive possibilities provided by drawing instruments. The illustrations for *Posliedky* (Stalking), a collection of Ladislav Kuchta's natural background stories, accompany the viewer into the forest corners of Slovakia. The soft trace of the pencil evokes the warm embrace of nature, its beauty and peaceful harmony, so that today, perhaps even more than in the period of the creation of these pictures, we feel the need for time spent away from the city and the achievements of civilization. Many other illustrated books show the author's capacity in the artistic studying of historical, geographical or ethnographic facts, even very distant ones. The scenes, however, never stop at the stating of the phenomenology of the outer world. This is most evident in the illustrations that form a compositional construction surpassing ordinary sight logic. The illustrator balances the rough charm of the hitchhiking experiences of the Siberian hunter *Dersu Uzala* in Vladimir Arsenjev's adventure travelogue with the quiet majesty of fauna and flora of the hitherto little explored Ussurian taiga. At the centre of each however is located an 'eye' to another, intimate reality, in which is present the subjective element, and a parallel world of thoughts, memories and feelings.

Iveta Gal Drzewiecka

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(introduction to the exhibition
Jozef Cesnak... and the three investigators,
THIS! is the Gallery, 4. 2. – 29. 4. 2016)

Běla Kolčáková
Ondrej Zimka
Agneša Sigetová
Jana Kiselová-Sitekova
Ľuba Končeková-Veselá
Karol Ondreička ml.
Kamila Štanclová
Robert Brun
Dušan Kállay
Peter Klúčik
Martin Kellenberger
Ľuboslav Paľo
Miloš Kopták



Běla Kolčáková (1937)

She studied under Vlastimil Rada at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, then spent more than a decade based near Dolný Kubín, and later moved to Bratislava. She employs many techniques, her portfolio is that of a dreamy, surreal world and has equal share of paintings, drawings, book illustrations, but also collages and tapestries. She created illustrations for books such as *Gilgameš* by Vojtech Zamarovský or *Pehavý noštek* by Hana Zelinová, Slovak translation of *Cuentos de Guane* by Nersys Filipe, as well as for many books of folk tales and legends.

Ondrej Zimka (1937)

The artist studied in the Studios of Applied Graphics under professors Juraj Chovan and Peter Matejka. His key material was wood – raw, with all its flaws, cracks, unevenness and knots, as well as ordinary plywood. In addition to other genres, he produces book and magazine illustrations, posters, cartoons, and animated films. He illustrated more than a hundred books – for example *Rozprávky na niti* by Ľubomír Feldek, *No a čo* by Milka Zimková, *Ďuro, pozdrav Ďura* by Vincent Šikula, *Dúha farbičky si strúha* by Jozef Pavlovič, and *Zajko* by Ľudmila Podjavorinská.

Agnesa Sigetová (1939 - 2004)

Made her debut in 1966 at the Gallery of Youth, but after 1971 she exhibited little and illustrated more. However, even there – in books – she was expressive to the point of suggestiveness, experimenting with technique, trying out new expressive possibilities, such as photo-collage. We can find her, for example, in Edith Södergran's poems, *Jesenná lýra* (Autumn Lyre, 1969) or in Miroslav Válek's *Troch knihách nepokoja* (Three Books of Unrest, 1967), or also in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Goodnight Haunting* (1968).

Jana Kiselová-Siteková (1942)

We all carry with us the traces of where we have come from... When we look at a child that has just been born, a flower that has opened up to our world for an instant, or a spring, full of freedom and

cleanliness, we have the feeling that they are really from a paradise where everything is in perfect balance and harmony. If we are born in the right place, childhood too is a paradise to which we always gladly return.

Even when our world has broken into pieces and we put it back together – we make a mosaic from the most precious shards and create something that, at least from a distance, resembles the lost paradise. And then we carry in our hearts our own made-up island and in the times of discomfort we hide in its bizarre mysterious corners.

Jana Kiselová-Siteková received as a gift not only a pleasant childhood, but also a great talent – the talent to repaint the world. She is not its restorer, she makes it over completely anew. It is as if she was remembering the paradise from which we emerged long ago. Her landscapes, plants, animals and people are full of fragile details that in the real world we hardly notice at all. Even the colours and the subtle structures of her pictures are woven from unknown mysterious threads... as if they were blown on the wind from faraway airy lands, from a castle over a sea hanging on a silk thread. Her internal world is inhabited by angels. Through her pictures they come into our presence – angel children, guardian angels and our daily helpers. She approaches her precious gift with respect and responsibility. Each touch on the canvas or paper has its own place, its significance, and its spirit. Her pictures are in a kind of artistic Esperanto which the whole world understands. This is proved by her awards – the BIB plaque from 1991 for *Zbojníkova dcéra Ronja* (The Robber's Daughter Ronja), in 2009 for the subtle book artefact from the Buvik publishing house *Anjeličku, môj strážničku* (My Guardian Angel) by Milan Rúfus. In her rich harvest are also found two Golden Apples – for *Adam a Eva* (Adam and Eve) from 1995 and for *Palculienka a Hodinky* (Palculienka and the Watch) from 2001. Among her precious awards also belongs her enrolment on the IBBY Honours List, and prizes in the competition, Slovakia's Most Beautiful Book. Her illustrations are also connected to a constellation of significant Slovak illustrators who, with their pictures, enriched and honoured the oldest Slovak children's magazine – *Slniečko* (Sunshine).

Her latest titles testify to her unceasing efforts – *Rozprávky z 1000 a 1 noci* (Tales from the Thousand and One Nights), *Rozprávka o rukavičke* (The Story about the Glove), *Biblia* (The Bible), the under-preparation *Cigánske rozprávky* (Gypsy Tales) from the BUVIK publishers. To the question of what good illustration in children's books should be like, Jana Kiselová-Siteková once responded thusly: "Sincere and simple, but at the same time rich,

so that the young readers take it up with curious eyes and open hearts." With curious eyes and open hearts, we too step into this new gallery, small in size yet large and open in spirit, and wish both it and Madame illustrator a lot of success.

L'ubica Kepřtová

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(introduction to the exhibition *Paradise again found, THIS! is the Gallery*, 17. 9. – 27. 11. 2014)

Luba Končeková-Veselá⁽¹⁹⁴²⁾

She studied first at the School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava, then at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design under Dezider Milly and Vincent Hložník. In 1979, at the Biennial of illustrations Bratislava, she received a plaque for her Illustrations for the Slovak edition Michael Ende's *Momo*. According to art historian Barbara Brathová: "her illustrations are characteristic by an almost ethereal fragility and tenderness, as well as optimism and a worldview subtly shifted towards the humorous, especially in the way individual characters are rendered. The illustrator uses the watercolor technique, which allows for both deep as well as a strikingly bright tones. The symbiosis of the dark with the bright and radiant is characteristic of her oeuvre. The combination of colors is extraordinarily tender, warm, and brightened by a sincere love of illustration for children. In her illustrations, the artist breaks beyond the boundaries and the contradiction between the visual phenomenon of stylization and the necessary degree of real shape and form. The almost gloomy, sceptical and depressing watercolor contrasting with the distinctive beam of bright light, defining the color of the dominant detail of the statement, which has become the artist's go-to means of expression, culminates in figurative compositions of the illustrations, and ultimately shifts them towards the lyrical." She has illustrated many children's books, including *Meduřka a jej kamaráti* or *Tutulaj a Vrtichvost* by Elena Čepčeková, *Rozprávky z radžovej záhrady*, *V našom meste býva Gulliver* by Alena Minichová, *Ryby ja raky ty by Ián Turan*, but also *Kam chodia na zimu zmrzlinári* by Daniel Hevier, or the Slovak edition of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*.

Karol Ondreička (1944 - 2003)

Have a look at a pile of books from the 1980s and you'll know: these are his books. You can distinguish his signature with the naked eye – thin lines, details hidden in intense shading that creates a permanent twilight, translucent colouring. And the faces of the heroes looking you (for the most part) right in the eye, looking out like a brand name from the book jacket so you get to know them before you start reading about them.

He illustrated tenderly. But not soppyly.

Barbara Brathová wrote this about him: "... now the illustrations are black and white, at other times softly coloured. But always poetic, heading towards forms of dream and fiction, but emerging from real events and the patterns... full of signs, hints, symbols, allegories."

So what are they like?

He avoided the so-called realities. By leaving out the details he worked down to a pure form – time, place, these had little importance for him. He concentrated on what was going on between the characters. Tension, relaxation... feelings.

Half-light, created by the strokes of a pen (one over the other) – this gave the picture some kind of dreaminess, carefulness, slowed them down. Mostly when the key motif appeared in them: the road. He repeated himself insistently, compulsively. Notice, he is in each book in a variety of variations.

At the beginning, at the end, he indicates that the story is still going somewhere, moving like a banal, readable symbol of hope. The drawings of Karol Ondreička gained unexpected strength in the so-called girls' books, for example in *Paulina* by Ana Maríá Matuteova. An untypical heroine: sickly, petite, hairless, lonely... from who you at first pull away. Boring. You say to yourself: "What can I get from her?" However, when you start to read and flip from one picture to the other, which actually are not very different the one from the other, you start to love her. This feeling of closeness between the reader and the main character does not appear just so, from the text. That is what illustration does. It accompanies him, doesn't get ahead of the story, doesn't pander, waits for the interest, only gradually opens up. And the reader feels it: that it is fragile on the surface, strong on the inside.

He avoided illustrating conflicts. In some way the thin lines couldn't support it. If there is conflict, then played down. It never came to fistcuffs. He enclosed it in space and reflected it in the expression. He went his own way – on the quiet side of the story, as if he wanted to squeeze the pleasant side out of it for the reader. As if he wanted to remind that art is not a certitude, that reading is a sort of holiday,

that you're supposed to walk away from the story with a bit of a lofty feeling.

Karol Ondreička did a lot of illustrating in the seventies and the eighties – over a hundred books, one after the other, often four, five, six annually, for the same edition. (That would tempt everyone to repeat themselves.) He was always alternating strong things, quality, but yet ordinary things. He changed forms, from light to sketchy, to heavy references, full of details.

He belonged among those authors who didn't much distinguish if they were illustrating for children or for adults. No pandering, lowering the bar, simplifying only as much as was necessary for him to be understood.

The grey period in which he lived most of his life, with an insistent feeling of permanent sadness, with an aftertaste in the mouth, added to the intensity of his works. An intimate feeling was springing up from within, becoming visible: reality was becoming a dream.

Ida Želinská

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*(introduction to the exhibition
THIS! is the Cabinet of Illustration XI.,
The Jozef Kollár Gallery in Banská Štiavnica,
6. 3. – 28. 6. 2020)*

Kamila Štanclová ⁽¹⁹⁴⁵⁾

...lies with a line. But how sovereignly! You look at it (the line) once and you feel that it is delicate, tender, a kind of hairline that only embellishes the story, decorates it. Then it doesn't give it to you, you focus, you start walking around the picture and... it's as if you're being splashed. You feel the power in the illustrator's hand, the pressure with which she drove the stylus into the linen, you feel the break, the scrape as she cut the board with the needle, the movement as she dragged the brush across the paper. Those lines make you go back to images you've seen once before, draw you into a whirlwind of micro-situations layered on top of each other. And again. And again.

That's just the way it is.

Kamila Štanclová. The one who tells every story she illustrates, one more time.

In her own way.

She never draws just a cut-out, a piece, or just a sentence she comes across when she reads a story. She patiently searches for subtle, seemingly unimportant details or minor characters and brings them into the picture. To these she adds feelings:

cold, warmth, pain, wetness, fear. She pulls it all forward, in front of the reader's eyes, and groups and layers it so that he feels he is not outside, that he is right in the epicentre of the action. She plays with his attention. She asks him: "And did you notice this (between the lines)?"

When she illustrates, she is childlike in her choice of colour, girlishly bold in her technique. And femininely vain in stylization – she hasn't a shred of respect for the authors of the stories. Every once in a while, she'll fit a piece of her life, the faces of her people, into a book and tell it her own way.

She is strangely complex.

What looks oblique on the page, between the words, is delicately and tenderly made by force – linocuts, etchings – her key techniques, are heavy and complex, not just physically, but in the way she uses them, as she weaves together dozens of thin lines into which she puts figures, animals and objects together. The force of her hand pulls the drawing to the ground, anchoring it, weighing it down, but at the same time releasing an energy from it that makes it tense, and what happens in it doesn't suddenly freeze, doesn't remain like a snapshot from a camera, the result is literally alive: fragile on the surface, pulsing strongly underneath.

Hey, maybe the way she creates could be reconstructed, all the combinations could be read – after all, she keeps going back to the beginning, circling the paper around her own idea, recording the process - both what she read and what she thought while doing so. Only if we try to do that, if we use the usual boxes of art theory, we find that it's not quite possible. That a lot of things don't fit, that they are different from what is usual. They don't fit because she doesn't calculate the outcome.

She is courageous. She is irritating.

Her work literally rushes forward from the pages, you can feel the speed, the drive, the passion from the paper... Often it's as if she's working with a semi-finished product - with a sketch: she reveals a lot about the story, and she reveals just as much about herself – about the minute in which she draws. After all – that's what she once said: "Every day, with pencil, chisel or brush in hand, I record on canvas, paper or in a sketchbook all the events, thoughts and ideas, because every moment of our existence is worth noticing."

Ida Želinská

*(introduction to the exhibition With Head in the Fire,
THIS! is the Gallery, 11. 5. – 28. 7. 2017)*

Robert Brun ⁽¹⁹⁴⁸⁾

He belongs among the expressive alchemists of the Slovak illustrator generation from the 1980-1990s. Many of them wrote themselves firmly into the history of Slovak, and I would say world, illustration. (Kállay, Mydlo, Dusiková, Kiselová-Siteková, Schnitzer...). The expression 'alchemist' here is not used lightly. Considerations on the definition and the boundaries of the concept 'illustrator' led these artists to an experimental approach and in the end to an original style. It is a paradox that in a time of the most severe 'normalization' there blossomed the expression of almost complete internal freedom, which was even spread on a mass scale. Perhaps due to the apparent insignificance of the child-reader, the comrades underestimated this area and left it a free course. And today we can be thankful for this lack of interest on the part of the authorities. In contemporary terms it is possible to talk about a kind of anti-globalization. This isolation in terms of image and information led to the necessity to create one's own path. The internet-less illustrators of those times had to make do with their own imagination and talent. Thanks to this, several unique illustrator endemics were nurtured here, among whom Robert Brun definitely belongs.

Thinking does not develop only through straight-line approaches and simple symbols. Knowledge of the world is a pathway, and most of us choose the appropriate level of difficulty. Robert Brun sufficiently encoded his knowledge of the world. He teaches us that the world is not simple, and we need a goodly amount of knowledge to understand it. He broke the original form of the world into small figures and then recomposed it according to his own matrix. As an aid, he left us the remnants of this concreteness, whose solving requires our full commitment. Working out his optical rebus certainly brings the adventure of discovery to us.

Miloš Kopták

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*(introduction to the exhibition On Miracles and Indians,
THIS! is the Gallery, 9. 4. – 26. 6. 2015)*

Dušan Kállay ⁽¹⁹⁴⁸⁾

For your name to become a brand, you have to have talent. You have to have the skill in order to create a good work. And the strength to push your ideas further along, right to the front. Oh yes, also the instinct of a predator. Having it is one thing, but knowing how to use

it with courage, without regard to the risks and the consequences. To show this 'something more', 'something different' than the others. To be a brand, it is not enough to create one, two or three 'top' things and to then repeat them, Warhol's 15 minutes of fame in the media will not suffice. Okay, to say the name out loud, "Dušan Kállay". Put in this name and tens of books with his illustrations come up on the display: *The Tramp* by Klára Jarunková, *The Maiden Tower on Devín* by Mária Ďuríčková, *Fairy Tales* by Hans Christian Andersen or *Slovak Fairy Tales* by Pavel Dobšinský, or *Alice in Wonderland* and *Behind the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll. All of them are connected by his clear signature: even the smallest illustration point is conceived as a labyrinth of thoughts – animals, plants, things and people (and their stories) mingle together. He never makes a picture of a piece of text, like a torn-off sentence, a situation – he looks for connectors, stacks details, mixes up symbols, images, takes it right to impressions, to revealing his own emotions, the experience of the reading ... and despite the fact that all the lines are thin, the strokes of the brush subtle, you feel that he is working with a tremendous punch but at the same time precisely, everything has a sort of legible logic. Still, he doesn't paint anything out of the ordinary – completely everyday people, completely ordinary things. What makes his work singular is the manner of creation of the composition, the way in which the work communicates with the reader. Take a look – the heroes from the books are looking at you, sometimes right in the eye. You're right in the centre of the action, even if from the side or behind the looking glass. This is not by accident, it is deliberate, calculated. For Dušan Kállay, the reader is a partner: ordinarily, this is common in works for adults, but he is this way even when he is creating for children, he never underestimates them, never does he adapt his conceptions to their age – he tells them: "Well, you look, you search, you examine this story (just like me)". When he illustrates, most frequently with gouache technique, sometimes he combines it with a drawing that becomes more than a basis, a sketch, but an equal partner in the illustration. He is an outstanding colourist – his works have outstanding colourity (the red period still hasn't left him behind) when the otherwise bright, aggressive colours are dimmed, reduced, moved to another context. He is the watcher, the witness to the tale. Simply © illustrator. Find the time. Stop by. And look at his works. For now, that's quite enough.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition © *Illustrator*,
THIS! is the Gallery, 14. 9. – 1. 12. 2017)

Peter Klůčik⁽¹⁹⁵³⁾

He was always unique. He did not follow fashion trends. He still "painted baroque" – he gave up the idea that "ornament is a crime" (Romboid magazine, volume LI, 7-8, 2016), he was firmly rooted in space, dense shapes, curves, jokingly hidden references, or some kind of "bows", games with colours. In a world of "full" illustrations in which there is almost no "white space", that "air" which leaves room for the reader's imagination.

At the peak of his previous work as an illustrator – at the turn of the 80s and 90s (although it is at least impolite to speak of a peak in an author who is still alive), he created pictures as if he were photographing text. Capturing a plot line, he would pick out a key sentence from a chapter and use his pen (like a camera) to stop the story at it. All the reader had to do was read with one eye, check with the other to see if he could see well.

The strong outline, the pen drawing, the now almost forgotten precise shading, creating the illusion of movement. Bold, almost candy-coloured, like something out of a circus poster. The clear recognisability of the characters: "yes, this is how – exactly how – I imagine the hero of the story should look", their realism, whether they are big or small, whether they have elements of real people in them or whether they are fictional creatures, and moreover they are legible: the good ones are nice, the bad ones are kind of ugly, and the funny ones are kind of funny.

He's always been lucky with assignments: Defoe's *Robinson*, Lidgren's *Pippi Longstocking*, Tolkien's *The Hobbit*... these were all books preordained for reading success. Yes, we can wonder if the power of Peter Klůčik's talent would have punched through even bad or mediocre texts, if it would have lifted them up, if he would have been able to sell them. And I always come to the conclusion that he certainly would, because he is one of those authors whose works simply make you feel that he enjoys illustrating them. That they are comfortable in unison with the text. Knowing that it's a gift to have a light hand and a sparkle in the eye.

That's Peter Klůčik.

Thousands of light-hearted lines that contain dozens of hidden jokes. This illustrator makes fun of everything. For the reader, however, he is readable.

Ornamental and yet not kitsch.

Sentimental, but not mawkish.

Good!

Ida Želinská

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(introduction to the exhibition *The key has been found, THIS! is the Gallery*, 15. 1. – 27. 3. 2015)

Martin Kellenberger ⁽¹⁹⁵⁷⁾

Is one of the most prolific Slovak illustrators. He has provided illustrations for more than a hundred books, most of them intended for children. He graduated from the Department of Art Education of the Faculty of Education in Trnava. He worked as an art editor in the publishing houses Tatran and Mladé letá, and currently works as a teacher at the Faculty of Architecture of the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava. He is a laureate of the Ľudovít Fulla Prize. He is the type of illustrator who likes to play it safe, betting on his perfect awareness of mainstream audience preferences which he is in turn able to work with sensitively, balancing on the edge between ornamental kitsch and visual playfulness. His works, mostly line drawings colored with watercolor, are simply "bright" – he likes to work with optimistic combinations of colors with dominating yellow – easily readable by even the youngest of viewers.

Ida Želinská

*(introduction to the exhibition
Ľubomír and Martin Kellenberger — Family Affairs,
THIS! is the Gallery, 12. 5. – 29. 7. 2016)*

Ľuboslav Paľo ⁽¹⁹⁶⁸⁾

He is the holder of a Golden Apple at the Bratislava illustration biennial, 2005. He is a representative of the middle generation of Slovak illustrators who, in recent years, has emerged as a popular and frequented personality in terms of the presentation of his work. Over the years his style has settled into a concrete form which is nowadays also recognized abroad. In his illustrations he artistically uses paint that is dense, rich and contrastingly combinable. Compositionally, he defines his area, now using the full colour of the leaves, at other times leaving air and space to his figures and area. His concentration on the figures of the zoomorphic realm is playful, he attributes human characteristics to the characters and grants them a witty sympathetic love. His work in the typology of books approaches the so-called Picture Book, a theoretical study of which he elaborated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. The illustrator is also active as a pedagogue, conducts workshops for illustrators, is a member of international juries, and a participant in exhibitions abroad.

Barbara Brathová

Miloš Kopták (1969)

At first glance, the entirety of Miloš Kopták's work forms two distinct and closed circles: free creation, which has an internally diverse structure, and illustration work. From a fine art point of view, each area has not only its specific means of expression, but also purposes. In spite of these two separate worlds, both areas are internally related, not however on the primary visual side, but in their artistic essence. Miloš Kopták is the kind of artist who tries to express his own definition of the artistic form, while, with insight, reflecting the thoughts and references that we take in from the wide spectrum of cultural history. He perceives their traditional meanings and values through the changing spectrum of time levels. In his illustrator's work he has created his own sign language, in which he absorbed the stimuli of modern artistic language in a distinctive morphology. The golden period of modern Slovak illustration from the 1960s, when dominated the books of Viera Bombová, Miroslav Cipár, Viera Gergel'ová or Albín Brunovský, can form not just a good background but may also be a stimulus for seeking his own path. Right from the first look, Kopták's work differs conceptually from this tradition. The association of the same or similar themes, texts and motifs have led to a differentiated artistic structure. The illustrating of tales and legends without regard to their origin (Africa, Greece, Spiš or Kysuce), did not become for Kopták a barrier to complex narration and dense plots. He chose the path of pictorial minimalism and monochrome colourity, while showing a sense for decorative monometallization of the subject and internal concentration. He marked the setting with minute details of flora, fauna, the environment and architecture. Through his method of usage of colour and compounding of the whole, he achieved deliberately naive poetic and magical effects. At the end of the day however are to be heard tones reflecting the principles of free creation – elements of grotesque humour and monstrous metaphors (deforming faces, masks...). Kopták expressed the diversity of creative approaches in illustrator work in further types of illustrating works. On the basis of the type of text he chooses differing technical and artistic conceptions, invents richer plot complexes, makes more emphatic use of drawing, and adds photographs. He layers the composition decoratively over the entire image surface, and does not shy away from decorative elements. In the book he wrote and illustrated, *Včelár* (Beekeeper) it was appropriate to put a type of artistic language into connection with animated film because the individual illustrations seemed to be calling out for

animation. If we track the pictorial details – figurines, characters, animals and objects – Kopták is preserving the identity of the artistic language and the sense of his own individual humour, and his overview. The revealing potential of Miloš Kopták's illustrations perhaps lies in the fact that a trained illustrator has not closed himself into the obvious skills of a draftsman, but has freed up the image field to the creative activity.

Eva Trojanová

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*(introduction to the exhibition
From tomorrow I'm not illustrating,
THIS! is the Gallery, 12. 9. – 28. 11. 2019)*



Peter Uchnár

Emil Drličiak

Vladimír Král

Martina Matlovičová

Katarína Slaninková

Bystrík Vančo

Dávid Ursíny

Matúš Maťátko

Ivana Šáteková

Daniela Olejníková



Peter Uchnár⁽¹⁹⁷⁰⁾

graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design – Department of Free Graphics and Illustration under Dušan Kállay. Already in 1999, he won the Golden Apple Award at the Bratislava Biennial of Illustrations, to which he later added many awards in the Most Beautiful Book of the Year contest. In 2005, he was awarded the Ľudovít Fulla Prize for illustration for children and young adults. To date, he has provided illustrations for almost thirty books – these include *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Maľovaná abeceda* by Ián Smrek, *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, and *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie. His muted "blue" illustrations are in fact full-scale paintings, crammed into the pages of a book. There is so much mass and yet such feeling of lightness. We can easily imagine them hanging on walls of galleries, and can scale them up using our imagination. They attract, pull in and tempt the readers to immerse themselves in the text. They rarely contain any blank areas, the space offered by the publisher is filled up completely, often with rotating, swirling, deep compositions.

Emil Drličiak⁽¹⁹⁷³⁾

He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava, graphic design studio with Prof. Ľubomír Longauer. From 1999 – 2001 he was head of pedagogy at the graphic design III studio at VŠVU in Bratislava. His works widen the borders of graphic design in the direction of free art. He came to the awareness of the public mainly through his illustrations and designs for theatrical performances. He is the author of the visual appearance of many books and catalogues, for example, *Macbeth*.

Vladimír Král⁽¹⁹⁷⁴⁾

You read the book, look at the illustrations.

And suddenly... you're at the theatre.

Really.

Vlado Kral's stories take place (as if) behind the scenes. Massive colour areas are stacked one on top of each other, and move between themselves. In their own way, all those animals, people and objects are around which the plot line takes place. Like a jigsaw puzzle, every single picture, every figure, can be easily broken down into details.

It seems that could easily disassemble their hands, ears or shoes and, by moving one over the other, change their poses.

You understand what you're looking at.

Even children who don't know how to read (or those who don't really like books) manage, just from the pictures, to say: "Aha, this one's doing this, and that one's going there" and deduce the plot line.

The dynamics in these illustrations are not constructed by any quick or intensive strokes of the brush, nor by the stylization (which is on the contrary slow and flexible), but by the colours. Areas full of warming, or on the contrary chilling, shades, dragged from side to side. They cover one over the other, contour the mass, create the effect of a picture within a picture. Everything is a couple of tones more intense than reality.

Somehow he does it – pulls you inside the picture.

This is no small thing, and neither is it simple. Bending down to a child, speaking 'their' language. Get into their way of thinking and, on that basis, stylize and compile that world inside a book.

He knows how.

How does he act to the story and to those who are going to read it? Hmm. how to express it... he is gentle and respectful. He doesn't transgress on their borders, he adds nothing to them, just searches for the first sign of fantasy, patiently, in the rhythm of the text. Everything in his books is so relaxed. They are good to read under the bedsheets, it's good to look at them, good to talk about them. He's witty, but he doesn't do cynicism, double meanings or offensive irony. He makes you smile rather than laugh, he glows kindly.

He likes to play along, bring out the pathos in situations, make use of powerful gesticulations. This is always very tricky ground for the illustrator, not to go too far with the descriptiveness or overflow the didacticism. With Vladimír Král, the result of such a balancing act has (so far) always been positive – he manages to keep his head above water – or above the illustration. He is open to inspiration, and he doesn't hide where it's from: in conversations he makes reference to European medieval painting, then later goes on about geometry. If we were to spread his books out on a timeline, one after the other, we would see that each has its period – some for years, sometimes one after the other - in which it is always similar to itself, knowable, and then transformed.

Finally, so far he has always been lucky with generous publishers able to understand that children need a lot of pictures, and big ones – so they will

remain in their heads for years, so that on their basis they can identify 'who is who' and 'what they are doing'.

Ida Želinská

(introduction to the exhibition
THIS! is the Cabinet of Illustration XIII.,
The Jozef Kollár Gallery in Banská Štiavnica,
23. 10. 2020 – 10. 01. 2021)

Martina Matlovičová ⁽¹⁹⁷⁵⁾

She first studied at the Applied Arts secondary school in Bratislava then at animation the Academy of Fine Arts. She is involved not only in book illustration but also in free art and wooden collaging in combination with textile, book illustration, graphic design and scenography.

When illustrating she applies her own metaphors to the pictures, but does not leave the author of the text on the side; she carries on a dialogue with them and fills out their story-line. This also applies to the style of her own work: her paintings are like collages – a part from the story, a part added on, a bit left to the imagination of the reader, all in fresh, imaginative colour combinations and most of all everything painted with humour so that the readers can laugh, so they can themselves look for jokes and pranks in the pictures. Still, she takes her work seriously. She says about it: "Until I finish a book, I am in such a strange mood that I panic even while doing my ordinary shopping at the grocery store... I would gladly change my style, but in a qualitative direction. It's such a vicious circle that every illustrator has to deal with. Being understandable without being kitsch. Books are primarily aimed at children, but you're no longer a child and moreover, as a professional artist, you have higher demands."

She has illustrated a number of successful book titles – *Ohňostroj pre deduška* (Fireworks for Grandpa), *Mačky vo vreci* (Cats in a Sack, Jaroslava Blažková), *Všetky moje zvieratá* (All My Animals, Kveta Dašková), *Mojka, Jojka, Komínová striga a baranček Albert* (Mojka, Jojka, Chimney Witch and Albert the lamb, Rudolf Dobiáš), *Keď lietame na veľrybe* (When We Fly on the Whale, František Rojček), *Lienky z piatej B* (Ladybirds from Fifth B, Dagmar Pokorná), *Der Elefant und die Pilze* (Jurij Brezan), *Drevený tata* (Wooden Dad, Tomáš Janovic), *Denis a jeho sestry* (Denis and his Sisters, Toňa Revajová), *Dokonalá Klára* (Ideal Klára, Gabriela Futová), *Tracyho tiger*

(Tracy's Tiger, William Saroyan), *Čauko, bengoši* (Ján Navrátil), *A pak se to stalo!* (And Then it Happened!), *Chrochtík a Kvikalka na cestě za blýskavým prasátkem* (Chrochtík and Kvikalka on the Way to the Shiny Pig, Ester Stará), *Žirafia mama a iné príšery* (Giraffe's Mom and Other Monsters, Alexandra Salmela), *Leonardo kocúr z ulice* (Leonardo the Cat from the Street, Ján Uličiansky), *Strom* (Tree, Alexandra Salmela, LIC 2020). Her works have been published in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Finland, among others.

She has won a number of awards for her book creations in contests like Slovakia's Most Beautiful Books, the Ministry of Culture SR Prize for Outstanding Illustration, the Golden Apple at the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava, 2009, for the books *Tracy's Tiger* and *Wooden Dad*. In the Czech Republic she won a prestigious award, the Golden Ribbon and the anniversary prize from the Albatros publishing house in two categories for the book *And Then It Happened!* The Golden Ribbon was also awarded to her in another cooperation with the Czech author, Ester Stará – the book *Hufflepuff and Squeaky on their way to the Shiny Piggy*. She has displayed her illustrations at collective exhibitions in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Italy and Japan.

Ida Želinská

Katarína Slaninková (1975)

Such thin lines, like hairpins, and so stacked up, in precise logic, creating a tangle of something that looks different from nearby than it does from a distance. And then the dense brushstrokes, the muted colours, the simplified stylization. And - in the next book - the greatly simplified colouring, enclosed in a strong contour. Then a suggestion of a comic book. And colourful – child (childish) drawings, just put a tracing pen on them and every third grader will draw around them.

Katarína Slaninková is a chameleon. She changes over time, but not in every book, she grabs one form and then pulls it, intertwining technical illustration solutions, repeating procedures in detail and only when she gets tired (or annoyed) does she abandon them and go in a completely different direction.

Pencil work is dominant in her illustrative work: you look and see her dancing on the paper. For she goes in a pair with the writer – in the passionate texts, passionately, in the forceful ones she pushes the line into the paper, in the simple children's ones she draws it lazily, lazily.

Always, she weaves into the illustrations the time and space in which the story takes place, playing with social reality, with her idea of the relationships in which the heroes of the books live - mirroring their wellbeing or their burdens in a way that the reader has no trouble deciphering – I simply look and see (what I'm about to read).

She does not give a damn about the idea that adult illustration should look important and dignified. Her illustrations by contemporary authors like Peter Pišťanek and Peter Krištúfek blur the line between the children's and adult reading worlds. And the illustrator enjoys it - balancing, testing how much the reader can bear. She pulls children into adult stylization, into pathos, subtlety, while on the contrary, leaving the adults surprised in the children's simplified drawing, in the carousel of colours.

She has become busy, and is thus given the possibility to choose. Or was it otherwise: her ability to change the way she illustrates, such artisanal chameleonism, brought her choice. Either way: she no longer has to illustrate with gritted teeth. That gives her freedom. Perhaps that's why many of her illustrations work beautifully as stand-alone works of art. They can literally be pulled out of books and not only hung on the wall, but seeming to say that new words can be attached to them. Even a number of times. With a different poem, or a different joke, they sound the same: really good.

It's a paradox: because Katarína Slaninková is not one of those illustrators who feel the need to hide her own messages for the reader in the details. She simply reads it and then draws it.

Ida Želinská

*(introduction to the exhibition
THIS! is the Cabinet of Illustration X.,
The Jozef Kollár Gallery in Banská Štiavnica,
4. 10. 2019 – 12. 1. 2020)*

Bystrík Vančo ⁽¹⁹⁷⁵⁾

Graduated in Promotional Art at the Private Secondary Art School in Bratislava. He is the author of illustrations for dozens of books published in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In 2007 his illustration was part of the international show Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava. In 2006, he was awarded the Most Beautiful Book of Spring by the International House of Art for Children Bibiana in Bratislava for his book *About a Tree that was on its Way*. His illustrations are modest and predatory at

the same time: he combines traditional stylization, a narrative style of depicting stopped action with unconventional processing, and vice versa. His work is conditioned by his choice of texts – from original, contemporary works for children, he has now moved on to illustrations of fairy tales. He used to scratch out stories in foam rubber, now he paints them in rich colours, highlighting the character of the heroes on large areas of colour.

Dávid Ursiny (1978)

The artist studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava's Department of illustration under Dušan Kállay. His portfolio contains mainly paintings and prints with oriental and biblical themes and illustrations which he created for folk tales of different peoples. His most prominent work are the illustrations for the Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* (The Song of the Lord). Other important examples of his oeuvre include those in the book of Indian folktales collected and published in Slovak as *Zázračný džbán*, or the Amazonian folk tales published under the title *Strom života*.

Matúš Maťaťko (1984)

Do you know what that is? Such a hooligan illustration. You open the book, you start to read and he – Matúš Maťaťko – throws a picture into the middle of the story. Throws, get it? Like a stone through a window, like a firecracker at your feet. The monotony of the black and white pages is crossed with transparent colour. He's disturbing you. The what, how, with what he does it can't be completely described. Perhaps it's the extra thick lines, perhaps the shaping, the gesticulation. Or the almost unmoving, frozen stylization? Enough with the wise words, let's say it straight out: he paints in such a way that he creates some kind of "whaaaam" effect, like in the comics. But in reality, it's not straight drawing like in the comics. For it to have the right intensity, for it not to be flat, he has to distil it, scratch the deposits of ornamentation off it, straighten out the lines where the content started to bend them. And so, he mixes old technology in the background – pencil, marker, pen – with these new ones in the finalization, where he just (ha!) thinks up the pattern, and it (on a tablet) colours itself. He folds them over each other, layers them until they merge and form a compact mass. I'm thinking about how to show you what exactly

an illustration by Matúš Maťátk does with a text. How he makes it more intense for the reader. (Because that's what illustration is about, right?). And I can't describe it better than that it is the Bart Simpson effect. He simply dashes through the story, with that movement, with a comment, he cuts through it. He draws attention to himself, he upsets you, he vibrates. Suddenly the story is jumping, the reading takes on a dynamic, it speeds up. And it does all that in very robust forms that we wouldn't expect from it. Maybe that effect of closeness is made by that line. Rough, pulled by force, pushed forward without its direction being felt. Hey. At first look it can remind you of a colouring book. But it's not that. It's a planned out, constructed contour that – does something else. It creates tension. Or could it be done by that colour? You have the feeling that it's too thick, that it doesn't shine through anywhere, that it perfectly fills the entire space – from line to line. It is rich, intense, but not cheap. It works. And you know what? Perhaps it is much simpler. The unforced expression, the naturalness of the styling. You read, you look, and you're close. In the sphere of art, the author is not standing over you as something great, noble. You don't have the feeling that you are stupider because you don't know what it's offering you, you don't understand – because you do understand. And it's all really authentic. He doesn't work similarly or like someone. He doesn't feel the need to hide the inspiration from graffiti, from applications, from the comics, he admits it. He is not raising illustration up to some kind of sweetish sublimity. Without restraint, he makes of the story a short-story. But don't go thinking I'm saying that you're looking at something cheap, a quick draw. No way! On the contrary. Matúš Maťátko is consciously shifting his borders. As he himself says: "I'm making up my parallel story, I'm always encrypting." He speeds up the thinking, he uses short forms, he condenses the message.

Ida Želinská

¶
(introduction to the exhibition
*THIS! is the Cabinet of Illustration XII., The Jozef
Kollár Gallery in Banská Štiavnica,
14. 8. – 18. 10. 2020*)

Ivana Šáteková⁽¹⁹⁸⁴⁾

Studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava, in the studio of Prof. Daniel Fischer. She has exhibited at the Dot. Gallery, Ateliéri XIII and the Dunaj Gallery in Bratislava. In 2013 she was a finalist in the

Essl Award, and in 2014 won the Tatra Bank Foundation Prize. She is a member of the drawing trio, Dzive, and cooperates with the children's magazine, Bublina (Bubble). She has illustrated *Básničky pre domáce paničky* (2016, Poems for Housewives), *Pes Moko a jeho oko* (2020, Moko Dog and His Eye) by Mirka Ábelova, *Zvieracie básničky na stenu* (2012, Animal Poems on the Wall) by Ondrej Molitoris and the third part of the poetry collection, *Studnička* (2021, The Well) by Milan Rúfus.

Daniela Olejníková (1986)

studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava under Dušan Kállay. She created numerous illustrations – ranging from those for Miro Čárský's subtle *O Basetovi, ktorý neznášal mláskanie* to Martin Vopěnka's trilogy *Spiace mesto*, *Spiaca spravodlivosť* and *Spiace tajomstvo*, to the *Mahabharata*. Her illustrations for the Slovak edition of Richard Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar* won her the Graphic Design Award (NKS 2010). Her range as an illustrator is broad – from children's books like *30 mušiek svetlušiek* by Jana Bodnárová to her own artist's book *Liek pre vlčika*. Together with Damian Pastirčák she illustrated the book *Vie, čo urobí* by the poet Katarína Kucbelová. The very nearly encyclopedic book by Jiří Dvořák, *Havětník/Hávedník* won her the Most Beautiful Czech Book Award in 2016. Her illustrations also accompany the story of the book *Útek* by Marek Vadas.

Veronika Rónaiová

4.5. — 5.6. 2023

Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design's studio of free graphics and book illustration and is an intermedia artist, graphic artist, illustrator, and painter.

She is an important creator in the field of hyperrealist painting, some elements of which she also carried over to her illustrations. She provided the imagery for many books – both for adults and teenagers. These include,

to name just a few, the Slovak editions of *Safety and Mystery* by Kirsten Holst, or *Breathing Lessons*

by Anne Tyler, *The Egg and I* and *The Plague and I* by

Betty McDonald, as well as *Dievča s bocianími nohami*

by Jana Šimulčíková or the story of two teenagers

fighting for survival in snowy, remote parts of New

York State – *Snow Bound* by Harry Mazer.



Alojz Klimo

6. 6. — 31. 7. 2023



Teodor Schnitzer

1. 8. — 14. 9. 2023



Jana Kiselová-Siteková

15. 9. — 15. 10. 2023



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Kurátor*ky / Curators

Miloš Kopták, Mária Rojko, Ida Želinská

Autori*ky / Authors

Otokar Bachorík, Jozef Baláž, Viera Bombová,
Zdeno Brázdil, Robert Brun, Albín Brunovský,
Jozef Cesnak, Jarmila Čihánková, Miroslav Cipár,
Štefan Cpin, Marián Čunderlík, Juraj Deák, Emil Drličiak,
Orest Dubay, Róbert Dúbravec, Rudolf Fabry, Rudolf Fila,
Viera Gergelová, Ferdinand Hložník, Vincent Hložník,
Dušan Kállay, Ľubomír Kellenberger, Martin Kellenberger,
Jana Kiselová-Siteková, Fedor Klimáček, Alojz Klimo,
Peter Klúčik, Běla Kolčáková, Ľuba Končeková-Veselá,
Miloš Kopták, Viera Kraicová, Vladimír Král, Ján Lebiš,
Vladimír Machaj, Pavel Maňka, Albert Marenčín,
Matúš Maľátko, Martina Matlovičová, Anastázia Miertušová,
Ladislav Nesselman, Daniela Olejníková, Karol Ondreička ml.,
Karol Ondreička st., Marián Oravec, Ľuboslav Paľo,
Dušan Polakovič, Veronika Rónaiová, Ivana Šáteková,
Teodor Schnitzer, František Šesták, Agnesa Sigetová,
Katarína Slaninková, Kamila Štanclová, Ján Švec,
Irena Tarasová, Jan Trojan, Peter Uchnár, Dávid Ursiny,
Bystřík Vančo, Jaroslav Vodrážka, Blanka Votavová,
Viliam Weisskopf, Ondrej Zimka, Mária Želibská

Texty / Texts

Katarína Bajcurová, Barbara Brathová,
Iveta Gal Drzewiecka, Beata Jablonská, Ľubica Kepštová,
Gita Kordošová, Miloš Kopták, Ján Kralovič, Eva Trojanová,
Miroslava Urbanová, Ida Želinská

Grafický dizajn / Graphic design

Mária Rojko

Odborná spolupráca / Professional cooperation

Kristína Mišechová

Jazyková úprava / Proofreading

Janka Jurečková, Miroslava Kuracinová Valová

Preklad / Translation

Janka Jurečková, Kristína Limbecková, John Minahane,
Kevin Slavin, Michal Spáda

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Anna Sopková, Jaroslav Beníček, Jozef Chovančák,
Róbert Klváček, Martin Kubina, Pavol Látal, Dávid Ursiny

Architektúra výstavy / Exhibition architecture

Martin Kubina, Mária Rojko

Propagácia / Promotion

Aurélia Garová, Alexandra Grúňová, Jana Janotková,
Zuzana Novotná

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