

Ideological Dialectics of Slovak Modern Painting (Man and the World in Slovak Interwar Painting)

The study deals with the beginnings in the development of 20th century Slovak painting. Its aim is to show, in contrast to existing historical-developmental theories, that modern Slovak painting has been constituted on the basis of an antithesis and polemics concerning neoromantic, folk-genre painting of the first half of the 20th century, the development of which was climaxed by Martin Benka's expressively monumentalizing programme. In author's effort is to present the fundamental outlines of the essence of the social motivation conditioning contradictoriness in the ideological programme of modern Slovak painting from the end of the twenties and the early thirties. He polemizes with the established view about the developmental model of Slovak painting involving a one-way and uncritical continuity of the various author-personalities and ideological trends. He arrives at the conclusion that the law of negating all what had preceded has evoked among the younger protagonists of modern painting an unambiguous discontinuity of traditions represented by Benka's neoromanticism and that of his apologists. At the same time, he focuses his attention on technically motivated painting which had become a base for formulating a primary ideological opposition to interwar painting. Specific feature of this opposition rests in the fact that in contrary to the principal European avant-gardes it didn't express the national vs. the international polarity, but rather that of the traditional vs. the contemporary or the conform vs. the nonconform. Within the framework of this opposition the study follows up the gradual codification of three dialectically interconnected ideological models of modern Slovak painting.

The first of these models interprets the world and man through the prism of basic humanistic ideals with which it objectivizes and rationalizes a traditionally romantic pietism in the portrayal of the ethnic and confronts it with a modern view of the world. The problems of this conception are best expressed in the work of Eudovít Fulla. At the opposite pole of this rationalistic model of the Slovak man and the world stands the work of Gustáv Malý and Mikuláš Galanda, who substitute an orthodox neotism for the idea of art as an instrument of a nation's self-confirmation.

The second modality of man and the world resigns to ethnologic abstractions; its specificity resides in an individualization of the image of man and the world. A maximal subjectivism in the interpretation of the traditional motif transforms the original causality "Slovak man in his world" into a much more contradictory relationship — reflections here run in terms of a concretely conditioned world and man. This problem group has its representation primarily in the rustic psychologism of M. A. Bazovský's pre-war work.

The last conceptual mutation in the projection of man and the world in our interwar painting is represented by leading painting personalities of the East-Slovakian creative circuit and their few ideative adherents. The starting plane of a social tendentiousness and urban topic is to them a basis for building up an ideological autochthonous programme marked by a polarity between a generalizing pantheism (Anton Jasusch, Edmund Gwerk) and an individualistic, existential determinism (Konštantín Bauer, Július Jakoby).