

PRESS RELEASE
7. 4. 2017

VLADIMÍR NOVÁK: CONTINUITY

From 28 April to 26 July 2017, Museum Montanelli presents an overview of the extensive oeuvre of artist Vladimír Novák, a leading member of the 1970s generation of artists and co-founder of the art group known as Loose Association 12/15: Better Late Than Never.

The main theme of Novák's extraordinarily focused paintings has been the fate of the individual within the tempestuous reality of late modernity, which strikes him as a vulnerable and precarious existence.

The basic features of Vladimír Novák's artistic talent were already apparent while he was studying at the Academy of Art in Prague, at a time when the echoes of the relatively open atmosphere of the 1960s could still be felt. During this period, he painted a series of dark and complex figural compositions that do not deny their neo-figuralist inspiration.

The second half of the 1970s and the later turn of the decade, which was an important period in the transformation of art both at home and abroad, found Novák in a situation where he was beginning to lay the foundations for his inimitable artistic vocabulary. The Czech art scene thus gained an extraordinarily distinctive and remarkable artist whose work continues to stand out for its freshness, vibrancy, and urgency.

At the outset of his career, Novák aimed for a grand painterly asceticism, a simplification of the picture's structural makeup. More than mastering the art of composition, he worked to reveal the relationship between man and space, to uncover the tension between the individual and the world. In order to depict this relationship as sharply as possible, he reduced his visual style to an intense, dramatic line, painted in shades of grey, brown, and black. He violated the established form of the painting, adding fragments of figures jutting out into space, their forms engaged in a dialogue

with the painting behind them. In these works, Novák re-examined the traditional form of the hung painting, relativizing its previous character while at the same time emphasizing its unexpected and constantly renewed ability to convey ever newer meanings and messages in a changing era.

Vladimír Novák's fundamental identity as a painter, however, soon forced this strict asceticism into retreat and unleashed both his gestural tendencies and the colorist qualities of his paintings. The purist space of his earlier paintings is now filled with fragments of the human body and all manner of imaginary yet vaguely familiar shapes. The figure – that symbol of human corporeality – explores space, testing its dimensions in order to understand its own status, its foundations and limits and perhaps even the reasons for its existence. It is unsettled by strange objects emerging from the interface between dream and waking, from unclear memories whose movement and rotation suggest the passing of time and confuse its sense of orientation. Novák's figures thus face the challenge of space and time, the challenge of a world that is being constantly reborn but of which he never becomes the unquestioned lord and master.

Vladimír Novák has never rested on his artistic laurels, but has always intensively developed his non-methodic approach to working with the traditional medium of painting. Today, he quite casually enters into the obsessive world of introspection in order to observe, from a certain distance but still with a strong sense of engagement, the world at whose center he always finds himself no matter where he is. From here, he listens to the murmur of stories and the trembling of fates; from here, he catches sudden glimpses of the not always clearly comprehensible symbols of reality. Some places appear in his paintings as if in a fog – unclear and densely impassable, full of difficulty and tempests from which emerge unearthly signs and symbols. Others are places of radiance and splendor, places of so many dimensions that they are beyond earthly comprehension.

Although many artists have mastered working with colors, the Czech art scene in the past decades has given us few painters capable of working with their abilities as naturally. Vladimír Novák is undoubtedly one of the few artists for whom painting and the image represent a purely visual way of communicating about man and the world. He is also someone whose work

has helped to re-legitimize the age-old medium of painting in a rapidly changing world.

Ivan Neumann

Vladimír Novák

** 30 April 1947 in Louny*

Education

1963-1967 Secondary School of Art, Prague; 1967–1973 Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (prof. A. Paderlík).

Member of “Loose Association 12/15: Better Late Than Never” since 1987

Novák’s works can be found in the collections of the National Gallery in Prague, Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region (GASK) in Kutná Hora, Prague City Gallery, Aleš South Bohemian Gallery in Hluboká nad Vltavou, Gallery of Fine Arts in Karlovy Vary, Gallery of Modern Art in Hradec Králové, Regional Art Gallery in Liberec, Gallery of Modern Art in Roudnice nad Labem, and in private collections in the Czech Republic and abroad.

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28. 4. 2017 – 26. 7. 2017
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