

Radislav Matustik obituary

In remembrance of Radislav Matuščík (April 18th, 1929 - August 17th, 2006)

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At the end of the summer one of the most important Slovak critics of art and art historians passed away, almost without any mediation or need for echoing his death in the mass media. His family, dispersed in the world and saddened by his passing probably wished to mourn him in private. Radislav Matuščík in recent years was falling ill, suffered from spinal disorders and had difficulties walking. He could not take part at artistic events, exhibitions and their opening ceremonies. His close friends did not dare to often disturb him, since he lived as a quite lonely man.

A destiny of Radislav Matuščík - as well as destinies of most personalities living in then Czechoslovakia, and particularly of those who were keen on the issues of 20th century and contemporary period, as he did - echoed political situation. Ideology formed culture and nowadays it seems difficult to explain it to those who did not experienced that. In 50ties, the time when he started to publish, there were fixed rules and limits of allowed possibility and impossibility of artistic expression and they must not have been broken or exceeded, if the author did not want to keep silent.

The qualities of Radislav Matuščík, such as his ability to foresee, his intellectual mind, knowledge and range of learning experiences were fully shown in liberal 60ties. As the author of so far unequalled monography on Ľudovít Fulla (1966), panoramic revues on modern Slovak paintings *Moderné slovenské maliarstvo* (1965) and on new Slovak visual art *Nové slovenské výtvarné umenie* (1969), he said yes to art Modernism and Neoavantgarde open to both European and worldwide ideologic and artistic streams. He did not like idleness, provincialism and conventionalism. In the first publication he focused on already known authors. While in the latter, where his essential introduction was completed by essays written by other writers, he explained his unique theory of succession of two waves of then young generation of Slovak artists, namely the Galandas and the Konfrontácie. He estimated most the works by two artists among all the representatives of Slovak post-war art, namely Ernest Zmeták whom he dedicated two catalogues (1956, 1958) and Vincent Hložník whom he wrote even two books (1962, 1969).

At the end of the 60ties Radislav Matuščík became fascinated by Duchamp's connection between art and life. He carried out an intensive study of actionist and conceptual artists and he himself worked with them in 80ties. His publication *Terén* in 2000 covers activities of this circle. In 1972 he was forced to leave the Department of Art history at

the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, where he taught for more than ten years. He was also deplored at the consolidation convention of Association of Slovak Artists in 1972. Since then he could not publish his articles, neither expose at the exhibitions. For twenty years he worked in one of cultural centres in Bratislava. Along with that, he studied authors of unofficial art stage whom he shared the same fate. His publication about their works titled "...before : 1964 - 1971" circulated for a long period as illegal book and a secret exhibition Suterén (1989) he curated, was aimed to show their works to friends.

After the Velvet revolution in 1989 Radislav Matuščík was rehabilitated and he could again publish and prepare exhibitions. He also came back to the Department of Art history at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, and gave lectures for a couple of years. Matuščík characterized with a remarkable commitment wrote for a magazine Výtvarný život, that stopped to be published later, organized individual and group works displays, particularly aimed to present actionist and conceptual artists and their works and installations. He curated their exhibitions, and wrote articles in catalogues, for some of them such as Jana Želibská he wrote even repeatedly in 1992, 1996, and 1998. He distinctively committed himself to Považská Gallery of Art and after the Velvet revolution he worked as the closest collaborator of its directors, both Alex Mlynárčík and Katarína Rusnáková. That was the place where he succeeded in preparing distinguished panoramatic exhibitions such as (Dream about a museum) Sen o múzeu (1991) and (Art of the 90ties) Umenie 90. rokov (1995). When the orientation of the institution during Mečiar's era was destroyed, he stopped to collaborate. It was a great pity that galleries in Bratislava only rarely appealed to him. Among his latest works we can mention a monography about Andrej Barčík (2002). Despite his poor health he kept working till his last and was preparing another book about a sculptor Ján Máthé.

We already know that Radislav Matuščík as a very distinctive, hardworking and determined personality and therefore critical and demanding with himself and with others, able to combine refined artistic taste and talent to write, will be very missing on the scene of contemporary art and artistic thinking and reflection.

September 12th, 2006  
by Zuzana Bartošová