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"RETROSPECTIVE"
SECTION IN THE SERBIAN PAVILION
AT THE 1911 UNIVERSAL EXPOSITION IN ROME
An Artistic Cross-Section of the Period

Abstract. - The emphasis in the works dealing with the subject has always been put on the highlights of the day, i.e., on the Kosovo fragments and Marko Kraljević cycle as represented mostly by Ivan Meštrović's sculptures. Lacking stylistic and thematic unity of the "historical" segment, another, "retrospective" section has not been as attractive either for the contemporary or subsequent interpretations. However, it may have a peculiar value from the actual perspective insofar as it appears as a cross-section of the Serbian art of the epoch.

Serbian Pavilion at the 1911 Universal Exposition in Rome has already been dealt with, both in view of its artistic contents, and from the standpoint of its political weight.* Naturally enough, the emphasis has always been put on the highlights of the day, i.e., on the Kosovo fragments and Marko Kraljević cycle as represented mostly by Ivan Meštrović's sculptures (judging by the data contained in the Catalogue, Meštrović's share made 74 out of 222 exhibits). Lacking stylistic and thematic unity of the "historical" segment, another, "retrospective" section has not been as attractive either for the contemporary or subsequent interpretations. However, it may have a peculiar value from the actual perspective insofar as it appears as a cross-section of the Serbian and South Slav art of the epoch. In the same way, the critical opinions on the exhibition outlined the general cultural climate and revealed social background of the set of values at the time. Therefore, the attention will be now directed towards the two exhibition halls of

* K. Ambrozić, 1962; D. Tošić, 1980; M. Adamović, 1990.

the Pavilion where the "retrospection" was mounted. All the energies having been invested in preparing and affirming proper display of the "national art",¹ the presentation of the other works of art was void of consistency and conception. Twenty six artists who appeared in Rome thus made quite a heterogeneous "representation." The youngest among them, Ljubo Babić, had just become the student of the Munich Academy, whereas the oldest, Steva Todorović, had begun his career as early as the middle of the 19th century.

The older generation was represented by Steva Todorović (1832-1925) with his academic Realism, an already anachronistic artistic manner. As a lively and enterprising spirit, he was one of the animators of the cultural life in Belgrade (where he had been living since 1857). He was the founder of the first school of painting, actor, singer, scenographer, advocate and professor of gymnastics, and besides, the author of the first exhibition of paintings ever mounted in Belgrade. With Djura Jakšić and Novak Radonić he contributed to a short-lived ascent of Romanticism in the 19th-century Serbian painting. Having become an official of the bourgeois *elite*, however, he gradually abandoned his original enthusiasm and turned, in his second phase (1880-1900), into a skillful and unimaginative professional. Such was the essence of the two static historical compositions he presented in Rome: *The Admission of St. Simeon to Chilandar* and *The Coronation of Stefan the Firstly Crowned*, which had been painted some fifteen years before. It was only *My Daughter* that might have mitigated the spectator's sentence.

Quite similar were the affinities of Uroš Predić (1857-1953), the author of historical compositions, large number of portraits and religious paintings. In Rome he was represented by three of his portraits : those of Laza Kostić, and two patriarchs, Lukijan Bogdanović and Georgije Branković. Thoughtful by nature, and of cultivated spirit, he was able to evaluate his own pictures from the distance of his solitude, as though he had detached himself from them and become his own critic. As early as 1908, with reference to this small portrait of Laza Kostić, it was said that its author "is not insensitive either to modern techniques or more Impressionist manner."² It is this piece of portraiture that seems to escape Predić's severe and partly justified evaluation of his own works: "The portraits are always similar to the original,

1 M. Adamović, *op. cit.*

2 M. Ćurčin, 1908, 944.

lacking other specifically pictorial features."³ Aware of the fact that art was undergoing great changes, he himself reached the verdict about the canvas he exhibited in Rome. With some bitterness though, he said : "[...] the picture of patriarch Lukijan Bogdanović who kneels and prays in front of St. Nicholas, pointing to a wrecked ship in the troubled sea. Symbolism of the painting is rather obvious to anyone who is familiar with Vojvodina of his times. This picture was displayed in the Pavilion of Serbia in Rome, but it passed unnoticed only because the amazing appearance of Meštrović overshadowed all the rest; and, secondly, because the picture bore signs of obsolescence and decline. Thus it hang above the entrance in a hall so that the awful crimson colour of the patriarch's garment should not disturb modern harmonies."⁴ Not always consistent in his judgements, D. Mitrinović said about Todorović's historical paintings and the two Predić's portraits that "they may be an object of affection for the painters themselves or the people of their Orthodox age and mentality,"⁵ but that such an exhibition was no place for them.

Painting of Marko Murat (1864-1944) was a kind of transition towards more advanced conceptions. Being one of those who were surpassing the prevailing academic Realism through the introduction of natural light into the picture, he was opening new possibilities for the Serbian painting. His first phase (1888-1914) was based upon the Munich Realistic principles, but the Mediterranean sun of his birthplace already started to play the game of light and shade (e.g. *Spring* from 1894, where "a Serbian painter painted sunlight for the first time"⁶). In his paintings all critics unanimously find melancholy and tenderness : "Mr. Marko Murat is an intelligent and tender painter. His work is always carefully done, well-measured, quiet, cultivated and tender. His paintings always depict some silent and lonely poetical landscape - a coast covered with flowers, with calm sea in the background, where, as if in a tale, lonely islands sale carrying sparse cypresses resembling to masts [...]. At a far end of his paintings, one or two figures always move silently, as though wishing to emphasize the loneliness or melancholic silence of the landscape."⁷ Such a description also applies to two of the eleven pictures he exhibited in

3 U. Predić, 1921.

4 *Loc. cit.*

5 D. Mitrinović, 1911, 569.

6 V. Ristić, 1969.

7 B. Popović, 1904.

Rome : *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Spring (Flowery Fence)*. There is a perfect correspondence between the paintings of this "painter-poet" - whose pictures, often in blue and violet tonalities, are "the impressions full of light and air"⁸ - and Dučić's verses :

*Sve je tako tiho... I u mojoj duši,
Produženo vidim ovo mirno more,
Šume oleandra, ljubičaste gore,
I bled obzor što se svijetli i puši.*

*Nemo stoje u njoj srebrnaste, rodne
Obale i vrti; i svetli i pali
Mlado krupno sunce; i ne šušte vali -
Sve je tako tiho... Mir... Svuda je podne.*

It was this lyrical and melancholic mood that Murat tried to transpose into his painting *Poor Maiden from Lopud*, which was not "the luckiest solution".⁹ Matoš described it as "blue nightly 'spinach' with a quite poor composition [...], naive drama and naive symbolism".¹⁰ General remark was that "the majority of his paintings is marked by a tonal monotony, which is almost exclusively based on various shades of blue".¹¹

The other paintings Murat exhibited were portraits (*Portrait of a Lady*, *Portrait of Friends*, *Prayer, or the Serbs Catholics* - a sort of group portrait, the portrait of crown prince Alexander). The portrait of *My Brother (Dum Andro, 1904)* may be singled out as "vivid, expressive and, fortunately, not too polished"¹² : it is a face lit up with light, wrapped up in transparent atmosphere; spontaneously recorded in a relaxed moment of reading, it radiates with serenity and intimacy.

Mitrinović resumed Murat's virtues and faults by emphasizing "the abundance of emotions he invested in his colours and tones [...] while painting dream, painting with dreams", as opposed to "weak and uncertain modelling".¹³

Such a transitory position was also held by Josif Lalić (1867-1953) from Split, formerly the Italian student, almost forgotten now. His share in the Rome exhibition was unusually large - six paintings and seven watercolours. Quantity was obviously not compensatory for

8 N. Petrović, 1904, 216.

9 M. Deanović, 1911, 139.

10 A.G. Matoš, 1973, 47.

11 M. Deanović, *loc. cit.*

12 *Loc. cit.*

13 D. Mitrinović, 1911a, 886.

quality - critics either said nothing about him or mentioned him only in passing. Mitrinović looked down on him as on "a nice painter, but indistinctly mediocre", pointing only to the technique of his watercolours.¹⁴ Lalić had been included in the Serbian section at the Yugoslav Exhibitions, and since The First Dalmatian Exhibition became a member of the "Medulić" group. His Roman appearance was based upon the Ragusan landscapes, figures of Montenegrins and inhabitants of Dubrovnik (their picturesque costume being suitable motif), and the compositions such as *The Insurgents* or *Montenegrins at the Kotor Market* (which was said to be distinguished "by the purity, vividness and abundance of colours"¹⁵). *The Pile Road in Dubrovnik* was described as "beautiful and successful piece of work, with much sunlight here and there".¹⁶

Paško Vučetić (1871-1925) also presented quite a number of paintings - eleven landscapes, portraits, and a kind of genre-scenes. As many others originating from Split, he had studied in Italy, then in Munich. At first, he was interested in Symbolist motifs - as early as 1904 Nadežda recognized Rops's ideas noticing, however, that each painting was done in different technique.¹⁷ Matoš's judgement from 1907 was pretty much the same. He thought of Vučetić as of "true Proteus among painters" for whom "style is not a personal or unique thing, but something that varies from painting to painting". Though a few were done in academic manner, "some landscapes are purely modern studies, while the harmonies of some genre-scenes in Vidović's fashion convey the atmosphere of a tired, nightly soul".¹⁸ Matoš thought highly of his landscape exhibited in Rome - *On the Danube* - as "beautiful, delicate, great". The reporter of the "Jug" considered his paintings as "*pleinairist*", and some of them "rather vivid". Generally, however, they "lack major artistic effects".¹⁹ Mitrinović's opinion may have been the highest of all, with reservations though that Vučetić "treats himself without seriousness" : "Mr. Vučetić works with ease, that is obvious; there is a certain elegance in his stroke, he has a good drawing, and his modelling is well-done in few strokes; besides, his sense

14 *Ibid.*, 888.

15 K. Jorgović, 1912, 399.

16 V. Lunaček, 1908.

17 N. Petrović, 1904, 216.

18 A.G. Matoš, 1973a, 33.

19 M. Deanović, 1911, 139.

for colouring is vivid, strong and clear; there is not much spirit with him, and his tone is empty, but the pictorial quality is incontestable."²⁰

Ante Katunarić (1877-1935), also born in Split and educated in Italy, presented two marine paintings, which were to be displayed at the Fourth Yugoslav Exhibition (1912) and, probably had been at the 1910 exhibition of the "Medulić". Matoš considered him to be a "blind imitator" of Vidović,²¹ and Mitrinović's opinion was also negative ("quite mediocre learner's quality").²² Together with Virgil Meneghello-Dinčić (who also appeared in Rome, but with one work only) and E. Vidović, Katunarić was the editor of a satirical magazine "Duje Balavac" substantially contributing to the art of caricature.

A painter from Sarajevo, Todor Švrakić (1882-1931), also presented two of his canvases: *Ulcinj* and *The First Sunbeams* (both displayed a year later at the Fourth Yugoslav Exhibition). Nadežda welcomed them as calm paintings of pleasant colours, done with easy strokes.²³

Nor were much better received Petar Poček (1878-1963) from Cetinje, and his heterogeneous paintings (ten of them) : from landscapes and genre-scenes to a sizable composition *The Fiddle*. Having been a student of the Italian school of Realism, he mainly stuck with Academism. After a short-lived lightening of his palette just around 1910,²⁴ he went back to dark tonalities. Some of his landscapes were evaluated as "rather nice", but the composition failed the exam : "It's too obsolete. Nothing of his own personality."²⁵ *The Fiddle* was done in an illustrative manner, under night illumination, with an abundance of ethnographic details peculiar to a Montenegrin house. Mitrinović met Poček's works with severe, even harsh criticism, saying that they "stupefy with their stupidity".²⁶ Such an extreme statement was inappropriate insofar as the "representation" of our artists was far from being "representative".

After his studies at the Vienna Academy, Lazar Drljača (1882-1970) left for Paris and Rome. It was in Rome that he first presented his works : *Portrait of an Artist*, *A Bosnian Girl*, *Mountain Motif* and *A*

20 D. Mitrinović, 1911a, 887.

21 A.G. Matoš, 1973a, 37.

22 D. Mitrinović, 1911a, 887.

23 N. Petrović, 1912.

24 V. Djurić, 1964, 11.

25 M. Deanović, 1911, 139.

26 D. Mitrinović, 1911, 569.

Gypsy. The insight into the European art he had gained at the Academy was intertwined with the affinity of his environment for story-telling and anecdotes, pleinairist pastoral landscape, domestic motifs - folklore, and portraiture.²⁷

Young Jozo Kljaković (1889-1969) exhibited *Male Nude* and *Eve*. The latter was judged by Branko Lazarević as a very good work "with well depicted flesh in passion, vibrant tones and characteristic details."²⁸ Symbolist interest in the erotic - with a tinge of saturation and resignation here - prevailed over the pictorial. The form, simplified in Sezessionist manner, bears traces of Meštrović's influence, especially the face itself whose rough profile repeats the sculptor's peculiar way to emphasize expressiveness.

Six paintings of Miho Marinković (1883-1933) also belonged to the Symbolist circle. Reproaching him for his much too literary style, Matoš described the atmosphere of his canvases in 1910: "Corpses, blood, battle and death : there is something strong, and Spanish, a bit of Zurbaran and Goya in this young man."²⁹ Having studied at the Munich Academy, he built his paintings with dark, gloomy colours and precisely defined forms without any interest in research on light and colour, except for their symbolic functions. Critics noticed his affinity for Stuck and Rops. The intention of his chalk drawing *The Ill Woman* was "not to prompt our compassion, but [...] fateful anticipation of death".³⁰ "Though simple in composition", the picture *Sinners* succeeded in "expressing the most complex emotions. The same applies to *Icarus* and *Longing*".³¹ Two portraits (*Self-Portrait* and *Portrait of My Father*) accomplished "what makes portrait a true artistic image", i.e. "the expression of character".³² The critics, however, were not always unanimous : Lunaček thought him to be "quite a non-artistic nature" and a dilettante who copied subjects, attitudes, even entire canvases of Franz Stuck.³³

However, besides the authors of the Kraljević Marko cycle, it was Marinković, Murat, sometimes Poček and Lalić that were praised by

27 A. Begić, 1973, 61.

28 B. Lazarević, 1912, 217.

29 A.G. Matoš, 1910, 805.

30 A. Milčinović, 1910, 822.

31 M. Deanović, 1911, 138.

32 *Loc. cit.*

33 Ć- [V. Lunaček], 1910, 1.

the Italian critics whose texts were reprinted in Belgrade and Zagreb newspapers.³⁴

From our actual perspective it becomes quite clear that the breakthrough into the new in the Serbian painting of the times was accomplished by the artists whose appearance in Rome remained almost unnoticed. These were Nadežda Petrović and Mališa Glišić.

Glišić's (1885-1915) painting *Tašmajdan*, Nadežda's *Barges on the Sava* and Milovanović's *The Bridge of Emperor Dušan in Skopje* (all from 1907) are considered to be the first truly Impressionist achievements in the Serbian art.³⁵ Glišić's Italian landscapes, painted in 1911, found their place among the five canvases he exhibited. Their atmosphere of solitude and mystery corresponds to the spirit of Symbolist expression of mental states. However, the irrational dimension of the painter's experience was transposed by very peculiar plastic means which must have been touched by Italian models, Segantini's for example. Yellow, green, and blue light condensed into a bushy structure of paint applied with a throwel. Such technique introduced the idea of tactile value into the Serbian painting.³⁶ Those were "monochromatic and gloomy pictures, which preferred matter to colour".³⁷

Nadežda Petrović (1873-1915) presented three paintings : *A Snowy Street of Belgrade*, *The Seine*, and *The Notre-Dame in Paris*. The first one was painted in 1908, whereas the two others belong to her Parisian period (1910-12).³⁸ It is noteworthy that, having arrived in Paris, she also began preparations for the Kraljević Marko cycle with the intention to do "seven large decorative canvases". She sent two of them for the Roman Exhibition, but they were declined.³⁹ In revolt, she wrote to Meštrović : "[...] you let Marko Murat, Bajalović, Steva Todorović and others be my judges, and say I was a 'pornographer' and my paintings a result of pornography."⁴⁰ This event alone testifies to the fact that her art could not fit in with the official public demands. In the environment where pleinairism was only accepted as an ultimate

34 *Srpski paviljon u Rimu i Meštrovićev uspeh*. *Srbobran* 87, 1911; M. Deanović, *Pismo iz Italije*, *Slovenski jug* 23; *Srpski paviljon u Rimu. Veliki uspeh*, *Večernje novosti*, 105.

35 L. Trifunović, 1973, 48.

36 *Ibid.*, 60.

37 *Loc. cit.*

38 K. Ambrozić, 1973, 45.

39 K. Ambrozić, 1978, 349

40 *Loc. cit.*

form of modernity, such an incomparable "leap" in the evolution of Serbian painting could not have been met with understanding. Not even the desirable subject-matter could prevent rejection. "Miss Nadežda Petrović is also superficial and lacks seriousness; she is too daring and too loud [...] There is some dynamics and some talent, both treated without seriousness, it is true, but both incontestable [...]"⁴¹ In 1911 this was the most that Nadežda's *The Notre-Dame in Paris* could get, the very same painting that is presently included among the master-pieces of her art and the Serbian art in general.

Tomislav Krizman (1882-1955) exhibited eleven copper engravings and four illustrations of Livadić's short stories. The time he had spent in Vienna in the period of the Sezession's vividest activity left visible traces. The most frequently registered influences have been those of Hodler and Fidus.⁴² However, these engravings, mostly depicting Bosnian landscapes, were quite realistic and descriptive. Tonal solutions sometimes merged with sketchy details, marked with clear contours. The greatest success among them beyond any doubt was the portrait of *Mary Delvard* (1908). The pale woman's face stands out against black and gray surface which was built with soft shading and slightly differentiated tones. An interesting framing of the figure into the right part of the surface contributed to the atmosphere of mystery. His illustrations, however, were permeated with the Symbolist spirit and the Sezessionist flatness, revealing "a lot of skill and a lot of taste", but "too much of Klimt's and Fidus's influence".⁴³

The work of Mirko Rački (1879-1982) originated from the Sezessionist currents of Vienna and Munich. In Rome he exhibited a series of 24 illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The entire series of drawings illustrating *Hell* was done on coloured paper in dark tones, with some parts finished off in watercolour or gouache techniques. Few illustrations of *Paradise* and *Purgatory* were more decorative and in pastel shades. Rački's paintings also dealt with motives from *Hell*: *The City of Dis*, *Minos (Francesca da Rimini)*, *Bloody River* and *Charon*. Dante's poetry was favourite source of Symbolist inspiration, especially *Hell*, as it offered the possibility of interpreting in a variety of ways the concept of this earthly world being the kingdom of Satan. *Bloody River* (presently found damaged⁴⁴) was mentioned by Mitri-

41 D. Mitrinović. 1911a. 887.

42 V. Novak-Oštrić. 1962. 11.

43 D. Mitrinović. 1911a. 727.

nović along with *The City of Dis* : "[...] if the admirable colouristic effects are set aside, as to the tone, the colouristic harmonies and the spiritual nature of his shades, Mr. Rački is greater artist than artisan, greater poet than painter, greater philosopher than technician".⁴⁵ Rački's Symbolist preoccupation with ideas was thus simply defined. It was confirmed by other critics as well : "In these pictures he appears as systematic thinker dealing with the problem of our existence on the planet Earth."⁴⁶ Literary background of his paintings could be recognized in the implied thoughts about death and the unreal settings of the lower world. Not only the accessories (skulls, fantastic animals) serve the idea, but the plastic means as well : intense contrasts of light and shade wherefrom yellow- and red-hot surfaces almost pop out; imaginary, dimmed space; pointillist technique lacking original motivation, used to effect a vibrant surface. His use of colour is literally Symbolist: *Minos*, e.g., is dominantly red, either in large surfaces (red mantle in the foreground), or underlying all other shades in order to demonstrate the atmosphere of death and passion.

Both Poleksija Todorović and Zoe Borelli presented one work only. According to the *Catalogue*, Vladimir Becić (1886-1954) exhibited two paintings within the Kraljević Marko cycle, but Mitrinović spoke about two portraits "with large planes, intense colours and thickly applied paint".⁴⁷

As to the sculpture, Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962) dominated both in the "historical" and "retrospective" sections. *Laocoon of our Times*, *Old Man and Girl*, *Head of Old Man*, *Old Woman*, *Innocence* were some of his works presented out of the Cycles. Rodinian manner of modelling was united there with the motives of Sezzesionist-Symbolist origin. This moralizing line would almost always mark his creations in one form or another. Prominent place among these works belonged to a piece of portraiture *My Mother* - hieratic attitude, static and frontal, in conformity with stylized drapery. Out of this geometrical structure, softly modelled face emerged.

Stylistic opposition to Meštrović and Rosandić was embodied in ten sculptures of Djordje Jovanović (1861-1953). It was academism tending to formal refinement, even idealization, and requiring full

44 J. Uskoković, 1979, 32.

45 D. Mitrinović, 1911a, 726.

46 V. Lunaček, 1910a, 391.

47 D. Mitrinović, 1911a, 888.

measure of skill. Delicate modelling and soft contours sometimes add a Romantic tinge. Mitrinović's evaluation was rather correct. He singled out *Sorrow*, *The Abandoned Woman*, and *Uncle Milovan* (portrait of Milovan Glišić), the latter containing some elements of Realism. *Rosa Belgradensis* and the bust of *Vladan Djordjević*, however, were criticized as comic, absurd, and dreadful. Generally, these works were designated as "non-sculptural sculpture, illogical to the material, lacking construction, strength and vitality, with more pictorial than sculptural effects".⁴⁸

Dragomir Arambašić (1881-1945), who was included among "future Serbian sculptors" the same year, belonged with his four works to the similar stylistic sphere as Simeon Roksandić (1874-1943). Roksandić was represented with one work only - *Surprise (The Boy with Turtle)*, his favourite motif: a boy stepping back in front of an animal. His interest in motion and anecdote, aroused in Italy, originated both from his affinity for Hellenistic sculpture and his own lyrical nature. Some of the critics considered this Italian influence as his defect.

Apart from his contributions to the Kraljević Marko cycle, where the vigour of expression was formally achieved by emulging Meštrović's style, Toma Rosandić (1878-1958) presented ten sculptures, mostly studies of heads and portrait busts, such as *Mother*, *Old Man* or *Gift*. They were distinguished by warm humane qualities, inherent in his true nature. It was accurately recognized by Mitrinović: "Mr. Rosandić does not have powerful and vigorous nature of Meštrović's [...] his domain is not that of courage, but of mildness, not strength but softness: that is his, and there he comes into his own."⁴⁹ As an exemplary work of Rosandić possessing all the required qualities and revealing his true nature in the most authentic way, he singled out the bust of *Mrs Berme*.

Though the Serbian art was represented neither in its totality nor by its best achievements the Rome exhibition did depict a cross-section of the art of the period. Its characteristics may be resumed as follows: a gradual transformation of academism took form of the pleinairist treatment of light including certain aspects of Symbolism and Sezzesionism. Research on light as central "subject matter" led to Impressionism. Its further transformation through the Cézannean or

48 D. Mitrinović, *op. cit.*, 805.

49 D. Mitrinović, *op. cit.*, 802-803.

Expressionist conceptions eventually led to other formal problems and paved the way towards another artistic period.

There is no doubt that the political aspect promoted by the "national" art toned down the variety of stylistic orientations that would enable, only a year later at the Fourth Yugoslav Exhibition, a much sharper distinguishing between "art and non-art",⁵⁰ between those who are "only extras in the art of their times" and those "who are distinct from their milieu for their intellect, individuality and the way they look on the people, and nature with all its phenomena".⁵¹

"РЕТРОСПЕКТИВНО" ОДЕЉЕЊЕ СРПСКОГ ПАВИЉОНА
НА СВЕТСКОЈ ИЗЛОЖБИ У РИМУ 1911. ГОДИНЕ

— Пресек уметничког лика епохе —

Р е з и м е

Веома занимљив наступ српске државе на међународној сцени 1911. године у Риму и раније је привлачно пажњу истраживача. Политичка тежина коју је овај догађај имао утицала је на то да је нагласак, и у прошлости и данас, превасходно стављан на тзв. "историјски" део изложбе (циклус Краљевића Марка и Косовски фрагменти), углавном представљен делима Ивана Мештровића. Зато се у овом раду већа пажња посвећује оном "ретроспективном" делу изложбе који, мада лишен праве концепције и неједначеног квалитета, представља пресек ликовног живота епохе.

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