Helena Capkova

Artificialism was an artistic approach formulated in Paris by two avant-garde Czech artists Jindřich Štýrský and Toyen (Marie Čermínová) in 1926 as a visual parallel to the new literary approach, poetism. The manifesto of artificialism published in ReD (Revue Devětsil, “Artificielismus,” in *ReD* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1927-28)) in Prague one year later calls for one to employ the “maximum of imagination” and for the “identification of a painter with a poet.” The key principle of artificialism is the use of memories and feelings productively, which is determined in opposition to the claim that the role of memory is limiting and negative. Associations and evocations that are confronted, structured and stylized into a colour composition also lie at the core of this poetic approach which shares some characteristics with contemporary surrealism, such as inspiration sourced from automatic writing or the aim to connect with the subconscious. The creative process pursued by the artificialist artists and poets can be interpreted as a journey to find topics in the sensual, poetic, and imagined landscape—the space between the conscious and the subconscious realm. As such artificialism is sometimes seen as a bridge between abstraction and surrealism.

Jindřich Štýrský (1899 – 1942) conceived of artificialism together with his artistic ally Toyen in Paris in 1926. As a Devětsil member, poet, painter and art theorist he used the pages of the well known avant-garde group publication ReD to publish the principles of the concept. His early work was inspired by cubism and primitivisim and later—after he returned to Prague following many years abroad in Paris—he became a founding member of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia. Štyrský is considered a leading Czech surrealist artist and a pioneer in collage and photomontage in the European context. This progressive expression in collage was developed and elaborated on by his successor Jiří Kolář.

Toyen (1902 – 1980) was a young revolutionary individual who stirred the Czech avant-garde scene with her provocative imagination and erotic art, and who mystified the public with her male dress, behaviour and sexually ambiguous pseudonym. Toyen was a member of Devětsil, livelong surrealist and progressive artificialist whose birth name was Marie Čermínová. Her contact with Paris intensified upon the foundation of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in 1934 and the visit of leading French figures André Breton and Paul Eluard to Prague a year later. Toyen continued her practice secretly during the Second World War and in 1947 she immigrated to Paris. Her work re-appeared on the Prague exhibition scene in 1966. Upon the dismantling of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in 1969, Toyen retired to her solitude and died alone in Paris in 1980.

References and further reading:

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