**Helena Capkova**

**Devětsil and Poeticism**

**Devětsil** was the name of a group of Czech avant-garde artists which was founded in Prague in 1920 in order to create an organised platform for artists that would serve as the way to artistic revolution. At the beginning, the group’s members took inspiration from Magic realism and studied proletarian literature, naming the proletariat as their ally against a literary culture they saw as being created by the wealthy, and the bourgeois. The group aimed to communicate about art to a wider audiance and therefore structured their events to be popular, open and diverse. The events (lectures, recitals, performences) were financed by the membership. Beginning in 1923 they formulated a new concept – **poetism** and in the same year the branch in Brno was opened. Poetism is primarily a literary movement that was never adopted abroad and as such remained a unique Czech avant-garde literary movement. The ambition of poetism was to become a way of life, so that life becomes a poem. Another goal was to break free from politics and to fill life with optimism. As a style, poetism encouraged both playfulness and a lyrical approach; in terms of form, the poetists ignored punctuation. Popular themes included moments of happiness, the present, and joy.

**Devětsil** identified the key problem caused by contemporary society as being the preveiling feeling of alienation among people and self-alienation. Poetism desired to help to rectify and overcome the alienation of individuals. Poetism is rooted in proletarian poetry that functions as spiritual and emotional preparation for revolution. The first formulation of the Poetism movement was published in 1924 and as the Poetist Manifesto it was published five years later in the journal ReD; the three section were – Ink drop (V.Nezval), Ultraviolet images or Artificialism (K.Teige) and Poetist Manifesto (K.Teige). The first members of Artists‘ Association Devětsil were: Artuš Černík, Josef Frič, Josef Havlíček, Adolf Hoffmeister, Karel Prox, Jaroslav Seifert, Ivan Suk, Ladislav Süss, Vladimír Štulc, Karel Teige, Vladislav Vančura, Karel Vaněk, Karel Veselík, BedřichFeuerstein a Alois Wachsman. In 1925 the group changed its name to the Association for Modern Culture Devětsil and absorbed the progressive theatre Osvobozené divadlo (Liberated Theatre) as the group’s theatrical platform.

In 1924 Jaroslav Seifert and Karel Teige left the group to focus on activities in other associations and the last group, the Prague branch of Devětsil ended its activity in 1930. However, the impact of poetism remained present in Czechoslovak literature until WWII and some ideas survived, for example in the songwriting of Jiří Suchý and Jiří Šlitr in the postwar period.

References and further reading:

Šmejkal, F., Švácha, R., Rous, J. (1986) *Devětsil : čes. výtvarná avantgarda dvacátých let*, Praha : Galerie hlavního města Prahy ; Brno : Dům umění.

*Revoluční sborník Devětsil* (2010) Praha : Akropolis ve spolupráci s Centrem výzkumu české umělecké avantgardy.

Vloemansm J.A. (1994) *Czech Avant-garde Books 1922-1938 = Knihy avantgarda - XX. století : Devětsil - Poetism - Constructivism – Surrealism*, Hague : Vloemans Antiquarian Books.

Toman, J. (2009) *Foto/montáž tiskem = Photo/montage in print*, Prague: KANT.

Birgus, Vl., Mlčoch, J. (2010) Czech photography of the 20th century, Prague: KANT.