

RUNDETÅRN COPENHAGEN ~ DENMARK



JOVAN OBIĆAN
DUBROVNIK ~ YUGOSLAVIA

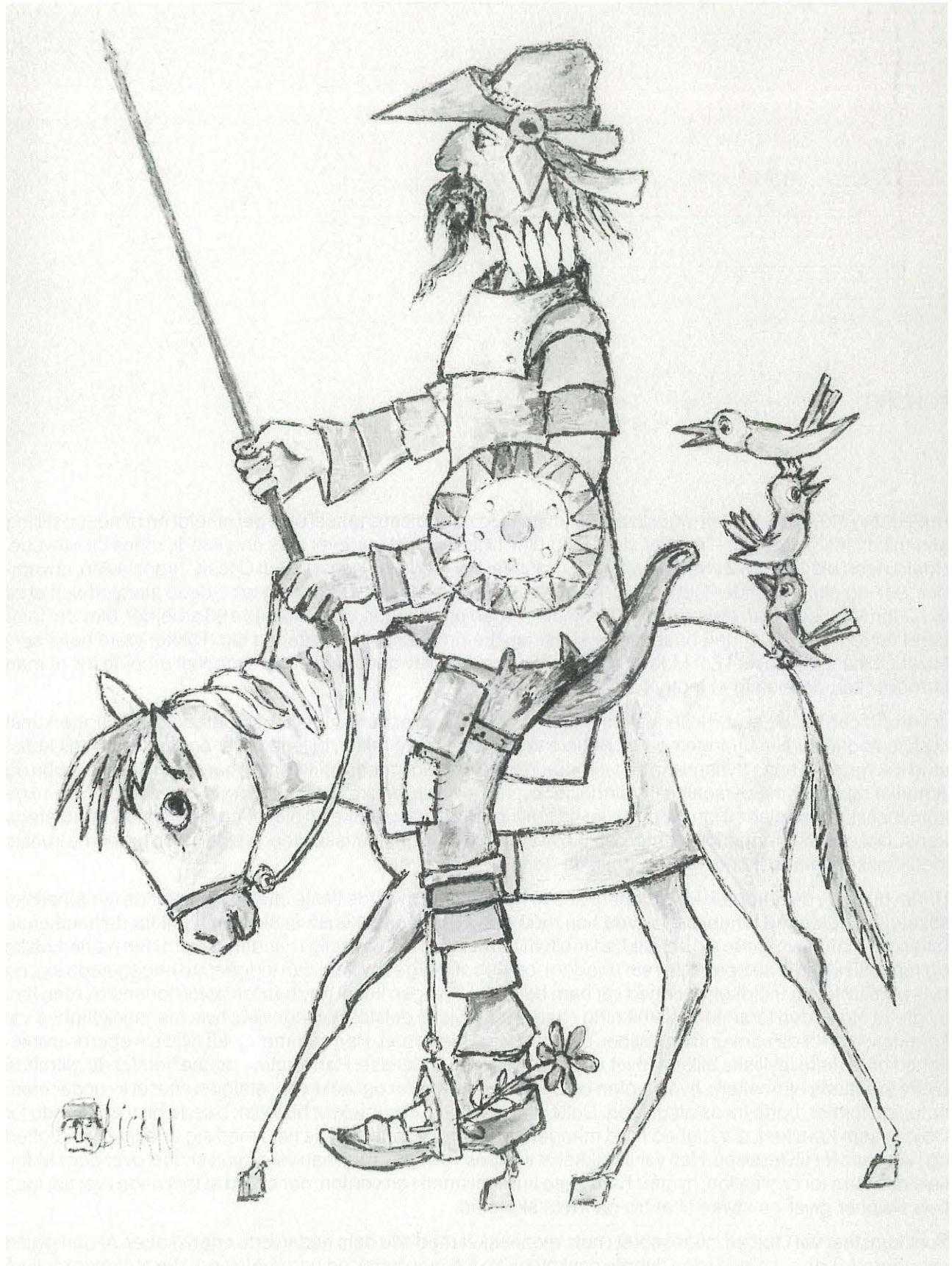
AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS, ENAMELS, SCULPTURE AND GRAPHICS

10 JUNE ~ 2 JULY 1989



Photo: Petar Otoranov

Jovan Običan, August 1984



DON QUIXOTE, 1985
acryl på lærred, 75 x 55 cm.

DON QUIHOTE, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 75 x 55 cm.

FORORD.

I anledning af 70-året for den jugoslaviske kunstner Jovan Običans fødsel blev der afholdt en mindeudstilling af hans efterladte værker – værker, der aldrig blev tilstrækkeligt vurderet eller anerkendt, mens han levede. Udstillingen blev først vist i Nadežda Petrović Museet For Moderne Kunst i byen Čačak, Jugoslavien, november 1987 og efterfølgende i Dubrovnik i efteråret 1988. Jovan Običan boede og arbejdede størstedelen af sit liv i Dubrovnik, som han elskede højt. I forbindelse med udstillingen, der omfattede 90 arbejder, blev der foretaget en registrering af den omfattende kunstneriske produktion, han efterlod sig. Takket være hans søn, Lazar Običan, og Museet For Moderne Kunst i Dubrovnik blev der udført et omhyggeligt arbejde for, at man fremover kan danne sig et indtryk af Običans værker.

Jovan Običan havde et afvekslende livsforløb. I sine unge år var han journalist, studerede billedhuggerkunst og forestod kulturelle arrangementer. Senere virkede han som maler, billedhugger og grafiker. Hans kunst stod i skyggen af hans dynamiske og vidtspændende personlighed. Splittet, som han var, mellem Europa og Amerika og med sine personlige forbindelser over store dele af verden, holdt han sig borte fra den hjemlige kunstneriske skueplads. Han gav sig ikke tid til at udstille og søgte ikke en placering indenfor den etablerede kunst. Det er kendtegnende for ham, at han hverken søgte kunstneriske ideer i vesten, den moderne kunsts ideologiske arnested, endsige tog notits af dem.

Under ophold i de europæiske og amerikanske kulturcentre, hvor de fleste ofte gav efter for de kunstneriske stilarter og konforme tendenser, havde han mod til at vise sit eget kunstneriske syn fjernt fra de herskende retninger. Han bevægede sig selvskikkert mellem to verdener: en uvirkelig i erindringen om den patriarkalske og romantiske tid, han oplevede i sin ungdom, og den virkelige i hvilken han indgående engagerede sig, og hvis primitivitet og ufuldkommenhed var ham bevidst. I sin egen kunst gav han fantasien fortrinsret, men han svigtede aldrig den forarmede befolkning i den jugoslaviske delstat Hercegovina, hvis menneskelighed var karakteristisk for de samfund og miljøer, der stod hans hjerte nær. Han sammenholdt altid sin egen livsvirke lighed med dette idylliske billede revet ud af forfædrenes tilværelse. Han foretrak denne fremfor de glitrende byers trættende atmosfære, hvor frygten og pengeræset florerer og vækker nostalgi efter et liv under mere naturlige former, borte fra asfaltjunglen. Dette brudstykke af et subjektivt historisk billede blev afgørende for Običan som kunstner, der i lighed med mange af sine landsmænd havde held med sig under udlændighed og i kampen for tilværelsen. Han var tiltrukket af vestens velstand, men han var afgjort skuffet over dens skånselsløse form for civilisation, hvorfor han søgte humanismen i en verden, der er ved at forsvinde i vor tid, men hvis visioner giver os styrke til at tro pålivets skønhed.

Som kunstner var Običan interesseret i hele mennesket med alle dets nedarvede egenskaber. Af den grund engagerede han sig aldrig i den dybere psykologiske tolkning heraf, og han søgte end ikke at skelne mellem det virkelige og uvirkelige i sin kunst. Den gennemgående figur i hans motiver – mennesket med de folkelige træk, der fremgår af klæder og social selvbevidsthed – er tilstrækkelig som kunstnerisk tema til at fremhæve visse sandheder af universel betydning, i hvilke nutidsmennesket genkender sig selv.

PREFACE

On the occasion of the anniversary of the late Jovan Običan, the artist whose work during his lifetime was not sufficiently acknowledged nor his deed clarified critically enough, a large retrospective exhibition of his artistic estate was organized in Dubrovnik during august and september 1987. This was in the city that he loved most and in which he lived and worked the longest. Along with this project, which encompassed 90 works, the important enterprise of registering and recording of catalogue data of the enormous production of this artist was done. In this way, thanks to the efforts of the artist's son Lazar and the Museum of Modern Art in Dubrovnik, a serious preparation was executed for future attempts to envision, systematize and valorize the encircled creative opus of Jovan Običan.

After the inaugural exhibition in Dubrovnik this retrospective is shown in the Museum of modern art "Nadežda Petrović" in the city of Čačak.

Jovan Običan had a very unusual life: in his youth a journalist, student of sculpture, was an organiser of cultural-entertainment activities, active in various jobs, as well as working in art; in mature years of life he is a painter, sculptor and graphic maker. His art is in the shadow of his dynamic and wideranged personality. Divided between Europe and America with his own personal connections all over the world he was absent from the domestic art scene. He had no time to right from day to day for a place at exhibitions and critics selections, neither did he in any other way take part in constructing ideas and practical profiles or our fine art. It is interesting that he did not search for artistic ideas either in the West – source of modern artistic ideology neither did he take notice of them in the world in which he himself got on so well.

Living in cultural centers of Western Europe and America that for most artists would be an irresistible challenge to give in to the swing of standardized trends and directions, he offered, with considerable courage, his own artistic vision distant in relation to contemporary contents and themes of the art in those regions. Moving with self assurance between two worlds: imaginary in recollections of the patriarchal romanticism experienced in his youth and the real in which he intensively took part and whose roughness and shortcomings he was acquainted with fully – in his own art he gave priority to the imagination. He never gave up the poverty-stricken people in Hercegovina with whose humanism specific for such communities and environments, deep in his heart he fully agreed. He constantly confronted the reality of his own life to this idyllic picture torn out from the lifes of our ancestors. He offered it to the tiring atmosphere of glittering towns in which the current of fear and money carries one and in which that picture leaves the impression of an unbelievable sight and awakens nostalgia for a life in more natural conditions away from asphalt deserts. That fragment of a subjectly transponed historical level determined Običan as an artist, who like many of our people, prospered and devised in migrations and struggles for survival. He was attracted to the Western world by its economic wealth, but he was certainly disappointed at its harshness of civilization, so he searched for humanistic ways in a world that is disappearing in our times, but whose vision gives us strength to believe in the beauty of living.

Običan as an artist was interested in the integral man with all his historic determinations. For that reason he never engaged himself in the psychological interpretation and in other ways partial aspects of the human being, neither did he even try in his own art to separate what is excitement to the eye from what is the impetus to reason. The figure of his fundamental motive – man with ethnical attributes in clothes and social determinations in the inventory which he possesses is sufficient as an artistic theme to announce certain truths of universal meaning in which the contemporary man recognises and sees something of his own fate.

For dem, der blev præsenteret for denne særegne, rustikke stil, må Običans mennesketyper forekomme fremmedartede og naive, fri for besiddertrang og frigjorte i deres beskedne, sunde ligefremhed. De forskellige muligheder og kunstneriske veje, som trængte sig på, og som i høj grad præger nutidige strømningers opfattelse og udtryksformer, fik ham ikke til at negliger tilsyneladende underordnede emner. Han fandt formentlig dette berettiget, idet denne opfattelse var sammenfaldende med en betydningsfuld udvikling inden for moderne kunst i begyndelsen af dette århundrede. I hans kunstneriske ide og form findes det tilbageblik, præget af følelse og stillingtagen, der blev indført af dem, der opdagede den primitive del af verden og studerede dens åndelige lighed og antropologiske forbindelse med moderne tiders værdinormer og kunst. På en ny måde genopliver hans kunst den gamle modernistiske ide med den forskel, at den ikke vender sig mod den afrikanske eller polynesiske verdens skulpturer men henter sin styrke i den kulturtradition, der tilhører Europa og gennem sin reducering til det symbolske har en stærk udtrykskraft. I sine værker indpassede han ikke de nye og afledede kunstneriske former, som i udalt grad udtrykker en bevægende følsomhed, og han distancerede sig således fra de grundlæggende principper i vor tids kunstneriske praksis.

Det romantiske var baggrunden for hele Običans virksomhed. Her fandt han grundlaget for sin optimisme som modvægt til den uheldbrede sorgmodighed, der i årtier gennemstrømmede europæisk kunst. Det var hans overbevisning, at kunstens tema er udtrykt i lignelser fra den daglige tilværelse, som den former sig i leg, humor og groteske situationer.

Običan udviklede sig hurtigt. I den korte periode fra 1950–1952, under socialrealismens svanesang, bevæger hans skulpturer og malerier sig inden for grænserne af en visnet kunstnerisk praksis. Gennem sine landskabsmalerier nåede han snart frem til den rationelle post-Cezanne form og ophørte således med den skolastiske gentagelse af de kendte løsninger. I 1953, da han malede „Den Lille Havn“, stiliserede han sceneriet efter en plan, som gav ham frie hænder, således at han i større grad kunne frigøre sig fra de beskrivende tesers forskrifter. I „Landskab“ fra 1955 dominerer en individuel følelse besjælet af den arv, der blev grundfæstet ved forståelsen af maleriet. Men allerede i skulpturen „Brud og Brudgom“ fra 1956 definerede han sit valg med hensyn til stil og emne. Fra da af og til slutningen af hans kunstneriske karriere vendte Običan meget sjældent tilbage til landskabet. Običan ville arbejde med et program, i hvilket han ville skabe særegne mennesketyper fra de forskellige egne i Jugoslavien, dagdrømmere, der lytter til fuglene og forstår deres sang. Ved at lade sig inspirere af folkeeventyrne og undgå spiritualismen i den hjemlige abstrakte kunst bestræber han sig for at forbedre temaerne fra folkelivet gennem episke særpræg. Idet han betragter folkelivet fra en svunden tid, opdager han foruden en heroisk drift en vis let genkendelig kerne af noget barokt. Ved at tillægge sine helte karakter gennem deres aktiviteter har Običan opsummeret og reduceret de vigtigste træk og detaljer til symboler og varierer individuelle temaer i billeder, skulpturer og grafik igen og igen.

Skønt han prioriterede de fortællende episoder i sin kunst på bekostning af hovedindholdet i maleriet, skulpturen og grafikken, holdt Običan sig aldrig tilbage fra at give plads for ændringer, når han skulle løse kreative opgaver, som rakte fra en malerisk betoning indenfor rammerne af en stiliseret skikkelse til det ornamentale, som igen går over i en forkærlighed for klare farver og sikre linier. Denne opfattelse udnyttede han i mange variationer gennem adskillige årtier, hvilket nok gav indtryk af forstening, men som til sidst forvandlede sig til en genkendelig stil.

Jovan Običans værker er på paradoks vis en modsætning til de retninger, som i årtier påvirkede den moderne kunst med tilflugt i åbne former såvel i værker som i materialer, og som adskiller dens centrale tema og form fra det folkloristiske. Han modstod på en meget dristig og anakronistisk vis denne retning og frygtede ikke, at hans kreativitet kom til at ligge på grænsen til happenings som en form for naiv kunst, med hvilken den på mange måder havde meget til fælles. Som et særegent fænomen fulgte hans kunst ikke de tendenser, der havde udviklet sig fra teorien, og den passede heller ikke til den filosofiske og økologiske ideologi relateret til teknologi og politik, som er den primære årsag til vor tids traumatiske og depressive stemning og triste landskaber. Som tiden går, vil der være mange forskellige meninger og konklusioner om hans kunst, men én ting er sikkert, at Običan konsekvent udviklede sin egen udtryksmåde gennem sit dekorative og lyse indhold, et fænomen, som hans samtid manglede.

Mihajlo Bošnjaković
curator

Nadežda Petrović Museet For Moderne Kunst
Čačak, Jugoslavien

In the world to which he offered a presentation of unique rustic contents, Običan's people with their culture must have seemed exotic and naive, unburdened by passion for possession, free in their modesty and healthy simplicity. Different possibilities and different artistic ways which imposed themselves upon him, certainly more affirmative and exemplary to the attitudes about which contemporary artistic movements organise their sense and expressive construction, did not make him abandon seemingly marginal theme. He found justification probably in the fact that in principle it coincides with an important process which was initiated by modern art in the first decades of this century. In the artistic idea and plastic structure of his work there is retrograde observation that as a model of sensibility and opinion was introduced by those who discovered the world of primitive nations, observing its spiritual likeness and anthropological connection with relevant values of modern times and modern art. In a renewed procedure, his art revitalises that old modernistic idea, the difference being that it does not turn to the world of African and Oceanic sculpture, but gets its strength from cultural tradition of the native soil which geographically belongs to Europe, but in the same way its reduction to the symbol and in this age has a strong expressive power. He didn't integrate in his art those growing and derived artistic forms that greatly take part in moving contemporary sensibility and new understandings, in which way he distanced himself from the fundamental courses of our contemporary artistic practice.

Romanticism was the foundation of each of Običan's artistic creations, in it he found reasons for optimistic poetry as opposition to the incurable tragism which for decades flows through the European modern art overcoming its initial attitudes sometimes directed to brighter horizons. He persevered in his conviction that the theme of our art lives in a parabolic form of national life, in its behaviour, play, humor and grotesque situations to which fate brought it.

By the logic of the times we live in and in which his youth was spent, Običan quickly passed through the preliminary phase of his artistic desires. In that short – lasting period (1950-1952) at the sunset of the social-realism, the plastic solutions of his sculptures and paintings move within ideological boundaries of a withered artistic practice. Soon, painting landscapes he comes to post-Cezanne rational forms and that is the end of the scolastic repetition of known solutions. In the year 1953, in the painting "Little Harbour" he stylizes the scene into a scheme that gives the author more autonomy and more simplicity by which he is freed of the program of descriptive theses. In the painting "Landscape" 1955, dominates an individual feeling still imbued with consideration towards the heritage established by the understanding of the painting, but already in 1956 in the sculpture "Bride and groom" he defined his choice with regard to theme and subject. From then until the end of his artistic career, very rarely returning to landscape, Običan will work on a programme in which he will build original figurative ensembles of characteristic types from our parts, interesting dreamers who listen and understand bird singing. Inspired by folkloric narration he will omit the spiritualism of native art of abstract type, striving to reform themes from national life by means of epic character observing folklore from a certain time and space distance, as a fact of the past, he discovered in it besides a heroic impetus also easily visible sum of grotesqueness. Authorising the characters of his heroes as carrier of specific activities, Običan had summarized and reduced till symbolic most necessary traits and details, varying individual themes in picture, sculpture and graphic until total exhaustion.

Although he gave priority to narrative moments of his artistic deed at the expense of very substance of the picture, sculpture and graphics, Običan nevertheless retained a space for oscillating in solving creative problems which ranged from a pictorial accent within the framework of a stylized figure to decorativeness which again has an exit in a folklore affinity for bright colours and firm lines. This adopted conception in many varieties he exploited for several decades which created the impression of an ossification of ideas that finally turned into a recognisable manner of this artist.

The whole artistic opus of Jovan Običan in a paradoxical way exists as a controversy to trends which for decades stimulated our modern art resorting to open structures of the artistic works and their material dissociate its central themes and most actual forms of folklore sources. In an anachronic way, very daringly, he resisted that direction not fearing that his creativeness remains on margin of happenings as a form of naive art with which in many respects it has much in common. His art as a unique phenomenon in our artistic space didn't follow tendencies developed theoretical assignations, neither did it suit philosophical and ecological thematics of reactions in relation to technology and politics as the main sources of traumatic and depressive moods and dull landscapes of the present. About his art, as time goes on, there may be different opinions and conclusions, but the truth will remain that Običan consistently built his own artistic expression as decorative and bright contents, that is, a phenomenon that his time lacked.

Mihajlo Bošnjaković
curator
Museum of modern art "Nadežda Petrović"
City of Čačak



THE WEDDING DANCE, 1984

Meget tidligt, i 1956, ændrede Običan motiv tilskyndet af den kendte kunstkritiker Sir Herbert Read, som havde besøgt hans atelier i Dubrovnik. Han ignorerede landskabsmalerierne og helligede sig skitsen af „den lille helt“ opængt på væggen i det overfyldte studie.

Efter at have set den, fremhævede den anerkendte kritiker dens originalitet. Tre år senere, i 1959, udtalte Herbert Read i anledning af Običans udstilling i Woodstock Galleri, London:

„Hans arbejde vækker stor interesse, blandt andet fordi det giver en velbegrundet løsning på det problem, der møder en kunstner i et land, der har undergået politisk og økonomisk forandring. Man taler med reservation om problemer, man ikke er personligt engageret i, men den akademiske realismes tradition, som begyndte under renaissancen, og som har udviklet sig i overensstemmelse med kapitalismens borgerlige idealer, kan selvfølgelig ikke have nogen mening i et land som Jugoslavien, der til trods for dets politiske forvandling fortsat er et land af bønder og håndværkere. En kunst fra og for et sådant folk må rent logisk forbinde sig med den nationale tradition. Det betyder dog ikke, at fremtidens kunst må immittere fortidens. Den ændrede sensibilitet, der har forandret kunsten i vor tid, kender ingen grænser, og en maler i Jugoslavien kan heller ikke undslå sig dens indflydelse. Men han kan formidle en sammensmelting af moderne påvirkning og den primitive tradition – dette er, hvad der i vid udstrækning er sket i andre lande, for det at vende tilbage til det primitive er også en bevægelse frem imod det ukendte. Krydsningen mellem den europæiske tradition (Pariser Skolen) og den primitive afrikanske skulptur var et afgørende skridt i den moderne bevægelses udvikling. Hvad Jovan Običan har opnået, er en fusion af lignende art, men i hans tilfælde er det fra hans eget lands primitive kunst, han har hentet den fornødne inspiration. I den hjemlige og stadigt levende tradition har han fundet ikke blot de episke og komiske prototyper til de skikkeler, han maler eller former, men også selve stilten i al dens arkaiske, umiddelbare og muntre udstråling.“

Fra det øjeblik og indtil sin død forblev Jovan Običan tro mod den kendte kritikers råd og opmuntring og udviklede i detaljer sine „små helte med de store overskæg“, som blev den foretrukne og uudtømmelige kilde til hans kunstneriske inspiration, en slags milepæl.

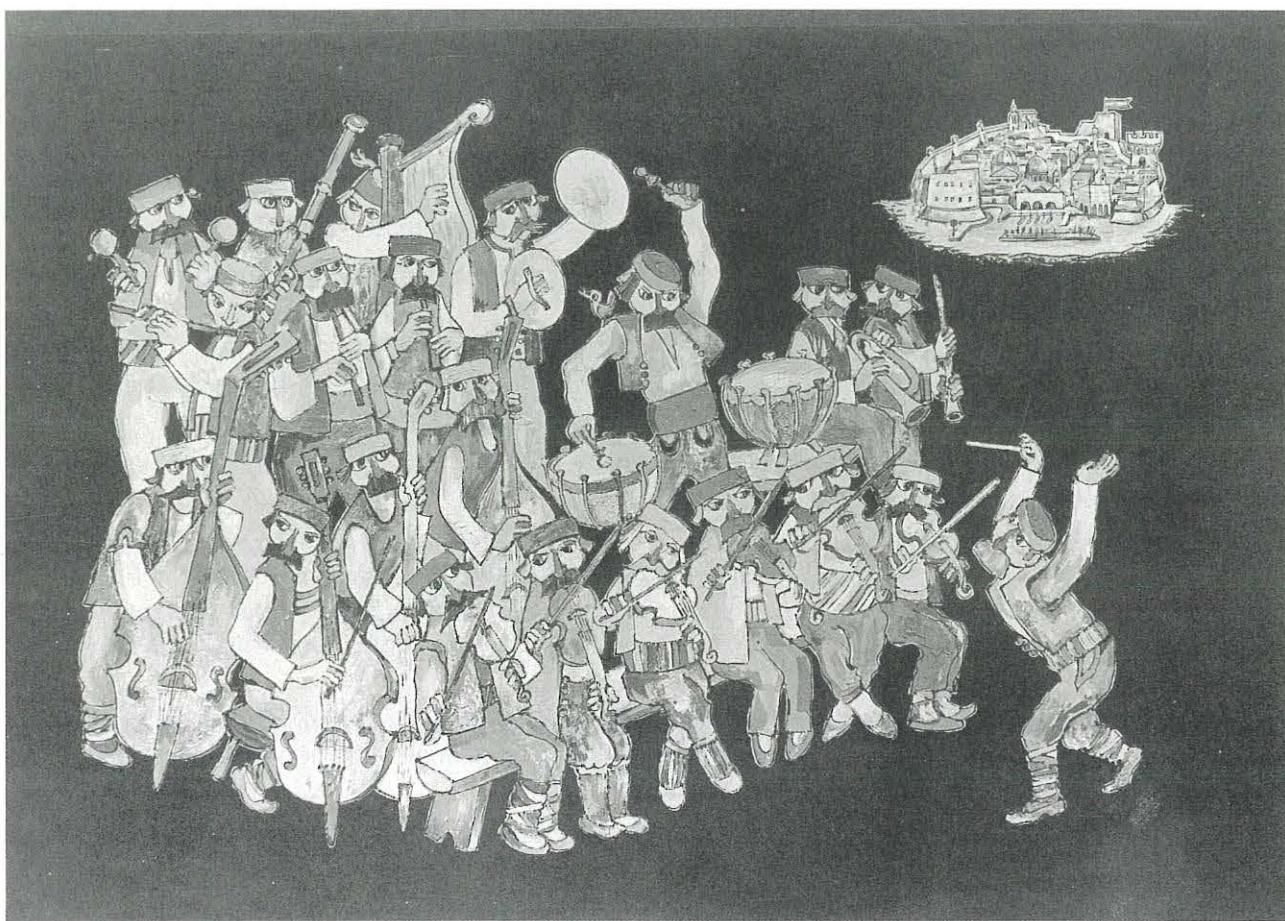
Når han skabte dem, havde Jovan Običan ingen tålmodighed, han malede rastløst, hurtigt og med vekslende teknik: olie, temperafarver, akvareller, grafik, collager, vægtæpper og emaljer. Han brugte brede og robuste strøg og valgte rene, glødende og melodiske farver.

Hans helte er trygge i en særlig verden, der er naiv, god og fjern, og fra hvilken de med menneskelig kærlighed og barnlig glæde på en særegen og velmenende måde opponerer mod den barske virkelighed.

Lucija Aleksić, Professor

akryl 42 x 60 cm.

DUBROVNIK SOMMER FESTIVAL, 1983.



Very early, in 1956, persuaded by a very famous art critic Sir Herbert Read, who had visited his atelier while in Dubrovnik, Običan changed his motif. He ignored landscape and dedicated himself to "his small hero" whose sketch was on the wall of his cramped studio.

After viewing it the reputable critic pointed out its particularity. Indeed, three years later, in 1959, on the occasion of his exhibition at Woodstock Gallery in London, Herbert Read remarked:

"His work is of great interest partly because it offers a valid solution of the problem confronting an artist in a country that is committed to a political and economic transformation. One speaks with reserve about problems in which one is not personally involved, but obviously the tradition of academic realism that began in the Renaissance and has developed in accordance with the bourgeois ideals of capitalism can have no meaning in a country like Yugoslavia, which is still, in spite of its political transformation, predominantly a country of peasants and artisans. An art of such a people, an art for such a people, must logically ally itself with the native tradition. That does not mean that the art of the future must imitate the art of the past. The change in sensibility that has transformed art in our time knows no frontiers, and a painter in Yugoslavia, cannot escape its influence. But he can effect a fusion of modern sensibility and the primitive tradition – that, to a great extent, is what has been happening in other countries, for a return to the primitive is also an advance into the unknown. The cross-fertilization of the European (School of Paris) tradition with primitive African sculpture was a decisive stage in the evolution of the modern movement. What Jovan Običan has achieved is a fusion of the same kind, but in his case it is from the primitive art of his own country that he has drawn the necessary inspiration. In that native and still vital tradition he has found, not only the epic and comic prototypes for the figures he paints of moduls, but also the style itself, in all its archaic directness and bright appeal."

Since that moment to the end, Jovan Običan remained attached to this well-known critic's advice and encouragement working out in details on his "small hero with big moustaches" who became the favourite and inexhaustible source of his artistic inspirations, a kind of his landmark.

When creating them Jovan Običan had no patience, he painted nervously, in a hurry and in various techniques; oils, temperas, watercolours, graphics, collages, tapestries, enamels. He put wide and robust layers and chose clean, glowing colours, full of sound.

His heroes secured themselves in a distinct world, naive, good and distant, from which they with small human loves and childish happiness, in a specific and well-intentioned way, oppose this cruel reality.

Lucija Aleksić, Professor

Jovan Običans imponerende og meget omfattende arbejde tæller mere end éttusinde kunstværker i afvekslende teknisk udførelse. Han begyndte med keramiske værker og gik derefter over til at fremstille skulpturer, oliemalerier, akvareller, akrylarbejder og grafik. Hans kunst fortjener et langt mere videregående og grundlæggende studie end den introduktion, der gives i dette katalog.

Ikke desto mindre må det være muligt ved denne lejlighed at fastslå tre elementære trin i kunstnerens udvikling, der kendes på den valgte teknik og hans kunstneriske modning, og som udtrykt mere eksakt er iøjnefaldende, når man vil undersøge og definere hans kunstneriske udryksmåde og let genkendelige stil.

Kendetegnende for det første trin er eksperimenterne i sten og keramik, materialer som kræver, at kunstneren må tilgodese deres særlige strukturer og karakteristika.

Jeg tror, at sten og ler har mindet Običan om den natur, der omgav ham i den periode, hvor han opholdt sig på landet mellem bjergboerne, dette mere eller mindre gammeldags folkeelement, undertiden primitivt men menneskeligt værdifuldt.

Jovan Običan beskæftiger sig dog ikke længe med at udforske sine muligheder indenfor skulpturen men kaster sig nysgerrigt over farver, og han begyndte at male.

Vi kan derfor tale om det andet trin, hvor hans opmærksomhed samler sig om naturtro landskabs- og bybilder. Han undersøger de forskellige tekniske muligheder og søger efter at finde sin egen udtryksform, som på dette trin, der støtter sig til visse forbilleder fra århundredets begyndelse, plejer at blive defineret som et udvalg fra en særlig farvepalæt med forkærelighed for de mere stærke og klare farver. Han glædede sig over deres konflikter, kontraster og harmoni.

Han viste snart sin forkærelighed for en vis forenkling i formen. Al sin tidligere erfaring med at skabe figurer i sten og keramik forsøgte Običan nu at overføre til billedets todimensionale rum med alle dets stiliserede og temmeligt groteske og komiske udtryk.

Vi kan nu komme ind på det dominerende tredje trin, „forte i hans opus”, den længste og mest produktive periode i hans kunstneriske liv.

Han helligede sig tydeligvis den rustikke eller endog naive form for simplificeret tegning og valgte friske og klare farver i fremstillingen af en slags stereotyp karikatur af en helt. Jovan Običan præciserede sin stil og hermed sin genkendelighed. Običan prøvede i virkeligheden at forene elementerne fra den autentiske kunst med sine egne følelser, d.v.s. „han udbreder dem generelt til de gængse førelsers højere sfære”, som Herbert Read skrev om Jovan Običan i magasinet „Studio” nr. 802, februar 1960.

Det er åbenbart, at Jovan Običan fulgte med i alle samtidige begivenheder hjemme og i udlandet, og han indtog en særlig tiltalende og vittig holdning, som besjæler hans værker. Han bestræbte sig for at udtrykke sin modstand imod de strømninger i den gængse kunstneriske smag, der med forkærelighed for dystre, dramatiske og undertiden sygelige fremstillinger skal give udtryk for atomalderens åndelige rastløshed med dens stress og økologiske uro.

Hans forpligtelse overfor livsglæden var tilsigtet. Denne glæde udtrykte Običan i et nok så begrænset formsprog, idet han hældede mere over til fortællende litterære elementer end ægte kreative former. Han forblev dog ikke desto mindre indenfor de elementære mønstre: lukkede kompositioner, lukkede former men åbne glødende farver.

Det er i sandhed meget ulykkeligt, at kunstneren døde på det tidspunkt, hvor han havde opnået større modenhed, og hans arbejde sluttede netop, da man kunne spore nogle nye retninger: tilbagevenden til landskabsmaleriet, rigere farvenuancer, nye ideer og endelig en mere erfaren kunstnerisk måde at give tingene an på.

Jeg er imidlertid sikker på, at det udvalg af hans kreative værker, som vil blive præsenteret i Dubrovnik, i Museet for Moderne Kunst, vil bekraefte hans kunstneriske modenhed og værdien af hans arbejde. De fortjener sandelig en mere tilbundsgående analyse, og maleren Jovan Običan gør sig fortjent til langt større anerkendelse, end den jugoslaviske kunstkritik har givet udtryk for indtil nu.

Tomislav Šuljak, Professor, kunstkritiker.

The impossibly abundant artistic opus by Jovan Običan with over a thousand works of art in various techniques, beginning with first ceramic creations, then stone works, oil paintings, watercolours acrylics and graphics, deserves a much wider and fundamental study than is the task of the introduction to the catalogue.

It might, nevertheless, for this occasion be possible to determine three elementary stages in the development of this artist, recognizable for its preferred technique and by his personal artistic maturing; to be more exact, obvious in searching and defining his artistic expression or identifiable hand.

The first stage characterises experimenting in stone and ceramics, materials which demand of the artist to respect their own structures and the essential characteristics of the chosen material.

I believe that at the very beginning, stone and clay reminded Običan of the forms in those materials that used to surround him during the time he was living in the country, among the mountaineers, the folk elements more or less archaic, sometimes even crude, but filled with meaning.

However, Jovan Običan does not remain long in examining his possibilities in the territory of sculpture but with curiosity transfers into the territory of colour, and he inclined to painting.

Therefore we can speak about the second stage, when his attention concentrated on landscape, countryside or town veduta. He is searching possibilities for various art techniques and is looking again for his own expression that will in this stage, leaning on certain models of the beginning of the century, define a choice of a specific colour palette with preference to more intensive clean colours. He was delighted with their conflicts, contrasts and harmonies.

Soon he discovered his own affection to a certain simplification of form. All his previous experience in creating stone and ceramic figures Običan now tried to transmit into two-dimensional space of the picture with all their stylized and rather grotesque comic expression.

Now we can speak about the dominant third stage, his forte in the opus, the longest and the most productive period of his artistic work.

Obviously, he devoted himself to the rustic, it could even be said "naïve" manner of simplified drawing and chose fresh and bright colours in creating some kind of stereotyped caricature hero. Jovan Običan defined his painting expression and determined the landmark of his recognition. Običan, in fact, tried to bring together the elements of authentic art and his personal sensibility, that is to say "he spreads it to the wider sphere of the current sensibility in whole" as Herbert Read wrote of Jovan Običan in the "Studio" magazine No. 802, February, 1960.

It is evident that Jovan Običan followed all contemporary events at home and abroad and insisted on a certain attractiveness and wittiness which imbue his works. It was his attempt to express his resistance towards those movements of current artistic taste with preference to sombre, dramatic and sometimes morbid statements in order to express spiritual unrest of nuclear age with its stresses and ecological disturbances.

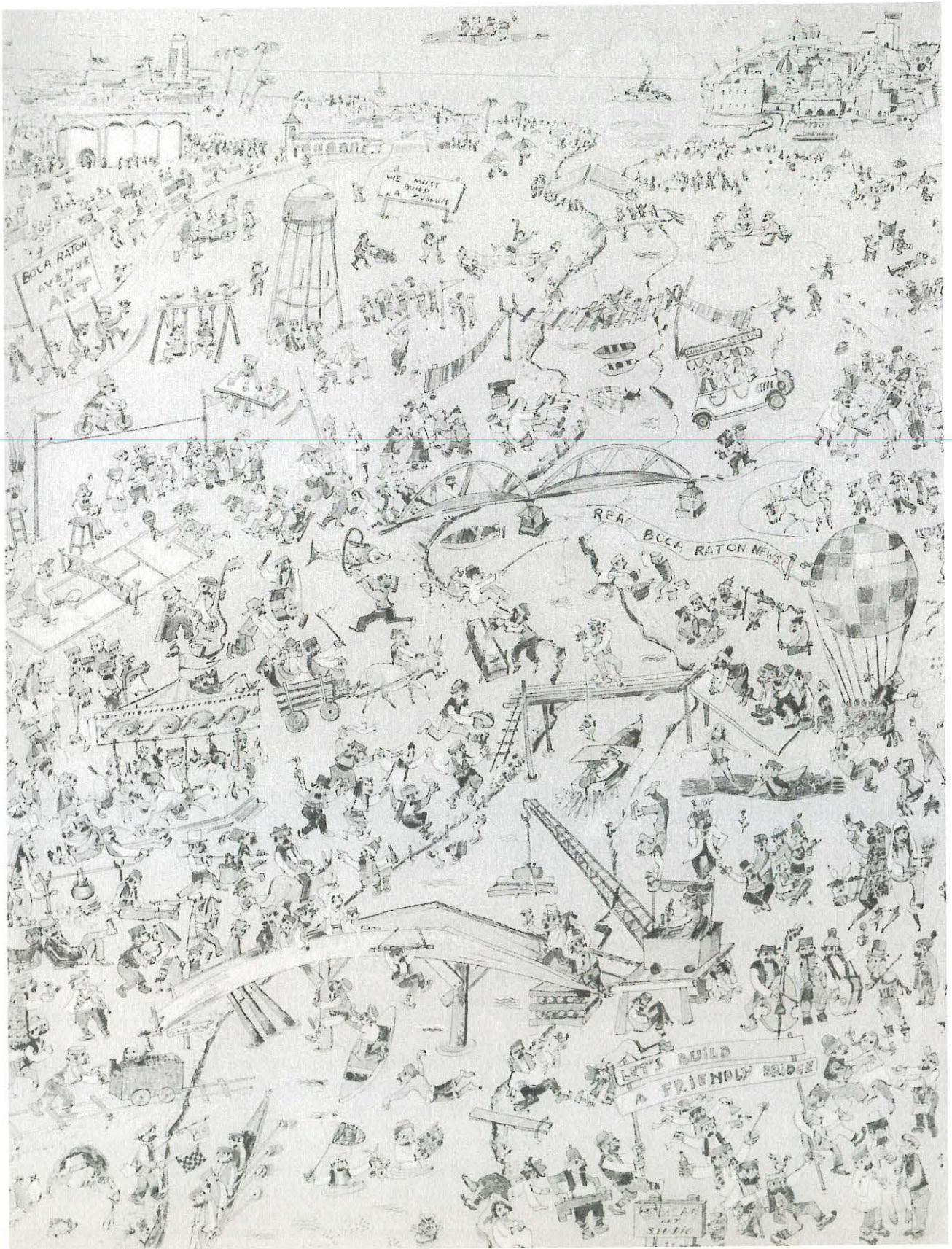
His commitment to the joy of living was intentional. This joy Običan expressed with a rather limited artistic vocabulary leaning more on narrative literary elements than pure creative forms remaining, nevertheless, inside elementary patterns; closed compositions, closed forms, but open glowing colours.

Persistent repetition of condensed number of motifs brought him often to the boundaries of certain manner, but he alleviated it by putting each time some other detail to the painting or changing the dominant colour in the base.

It is certainly very unfortunate that the artist died at the moment of his achieved maturity and his opus ended just when one could feel some new directions: returning to landscape, richer shades of colour, enrichment of topics and finally, more mature and experienced artistic approach.

However, I am sure the choice from the whole of his creative opus which will be presented to Dubrovnik audience in the Museum of Modern Art in Dubrovnik will confirm his artistic maturity and the value of his works. They obviously deserve a more profound analysis and the painter Jovan Običan deserves much more recognition than the Yugoslav art review has expressed, up to the present moment.

Tomislav Šuljak,
Professor and art critic



DET ER EN LILLE VERDEN, 1981
multimedia på papir, 61 x 46 cm.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD, 1981
multimedia on paper, 61 x 46 cm.



HØJT TIL HEST, 1986.
acryl på lærred.

RIDING HIGH, 1986
acrylic on canvas.



BLOMSTER OG FUGL, 1983.
enamel på kobber.

FLOWER AND BIRD, 1983
enamel on copper



VIOLIN OG FLØJTE, 1984.
emalje på kobber.

VIOLIN AND FLUTE, 1984
enamel on copper



VENNER, Juli 1980.

FRIENDS, July 1980

Forlægger / Publisher

OBIČAN ART STUDIO

Udgiver / Editor

LAZAR OBIČAN

Forord / Preface

LUCIJA ALEKSIĆ

Prof. TOMISLAV ŠULJAK

Udvælgelse af udstillingsgenstandene og layout /
Selection of exhibits and exhibition layout

LAZAR OBIČAN

Katalogets forside design og plakat /
Catalogue front page design and poster

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TED BURKE

CHARLIE SMALL

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SOUTHERN PHOTO

Transport / Cargo shipping:

ALLSTATE SHIPPING

ART SHIPPERS, INC

LUFTHANSA AG

PAN AMERICAN AIRLINES

Fotostat og Trykning / Typesetting and printing:

DRUCKEREI C. ADELMANN

6000 Frankfurt am Main 1

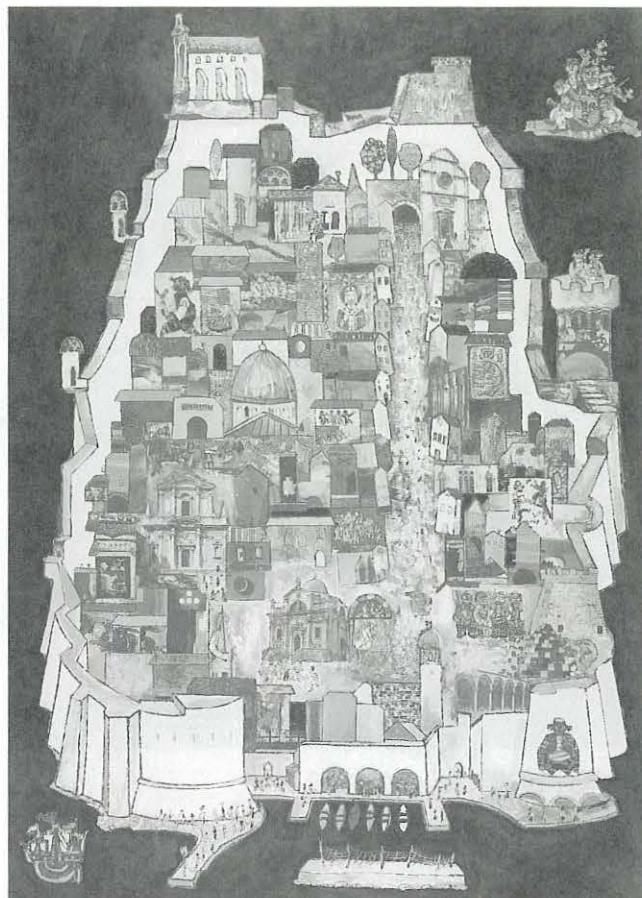
Eschersheimer Landstraße 28

(069) 596 20 68

(069) 59 06 23 telefax

West-Germany

Trykt i 2000 eksemplarer.
Printed in 2000 copies



DEN EVIGE STAD, 1981.

multimedia på papir,
200 x 140 cm.

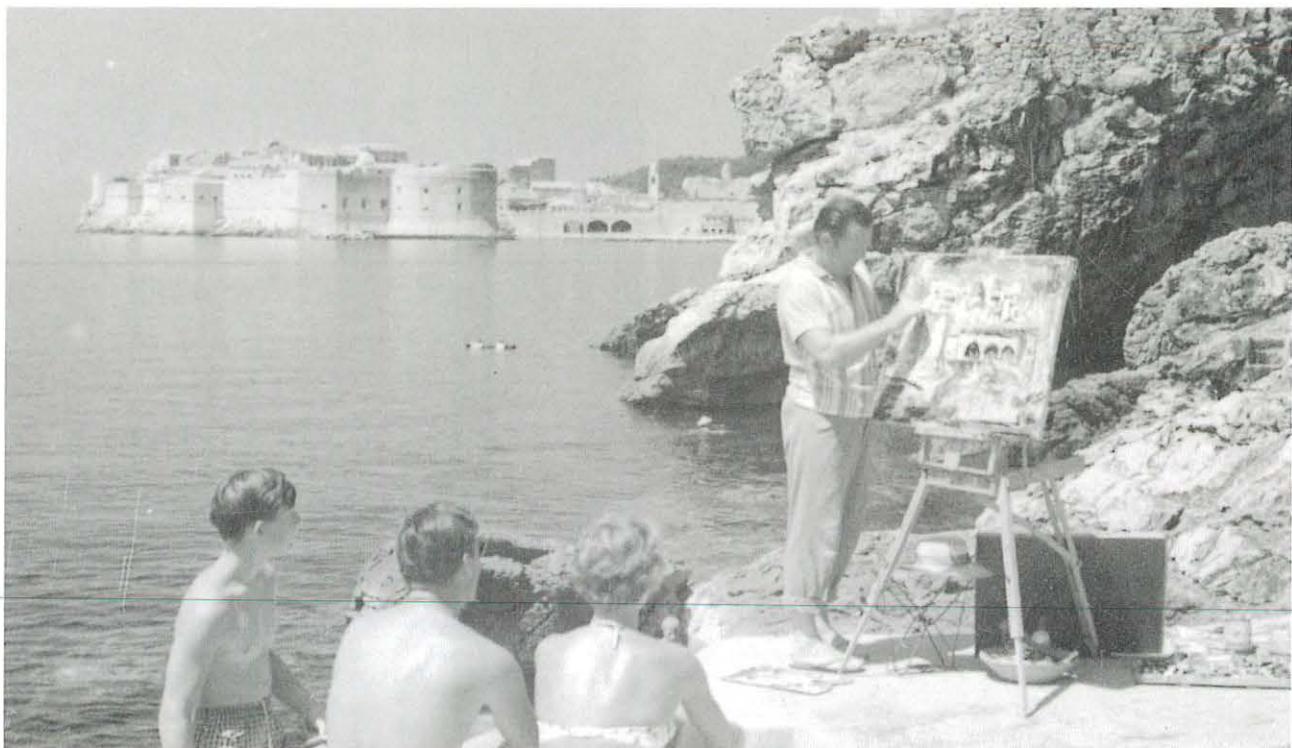
ETERNAL CITY, 1981

multimedia on paper,
200 x 140 cm.



Običan på tennisbanen.
Dubrovnik 1972.

Foto: M. Gluhajić



VED VANDET, August 1960.

ON THE BEACH, August 1960

JOVAN OBIĆAN (1918–1986) blev født i Cannes, Frankrig, af jugoslaviske forældre. Allerede som barn interesserede han sig levende for kunst og ridsede motiver i ler, når han ikke kunne skaffe papir. Han blev undervist af flere fremtrædende lærere i mange væsentlige stilarter. Han afsluttede sin uddannelse stærkt interesseret i sit land og dets folk, filosofi og sagn. Man har hævdet, at hans kunst er tidløs og udtryk for en naiv, barnlig og primitiv stil, der på samme tid er enkel og raffineret – barnlig og alligevel moden og mesterlig. En stil med psykologiske, filosofiske og sociologiske overtoner. Hans morsomme små mennesketyper er altid farverige, fulde af liv og i samhørighed med musik og fugle, der bringer dem glæde. Hans beundrere og samlere er talrige og spænder fra amerikanske præsidenter, senatorer og ambassadører til europæiske notabiliteter. Han har udstillet mange steder i verden og er repræsenteret i adskillige gallerier og samlinger. Mange kunstsamlere har fulgt Jovan Običan, og han er blevet internationalt kendt gennem omtale og ved sine hyppige udstillinger i USA og i Europa. Hans atelier i Dubrovnik var et velbesøgt sted for kunstsamlere og turister. Skønt han opholdt sig meget af tiden i USA, boede og arbejdede han i Dubrovnik.

Jovan Običan besøgte København i oktober 1960.

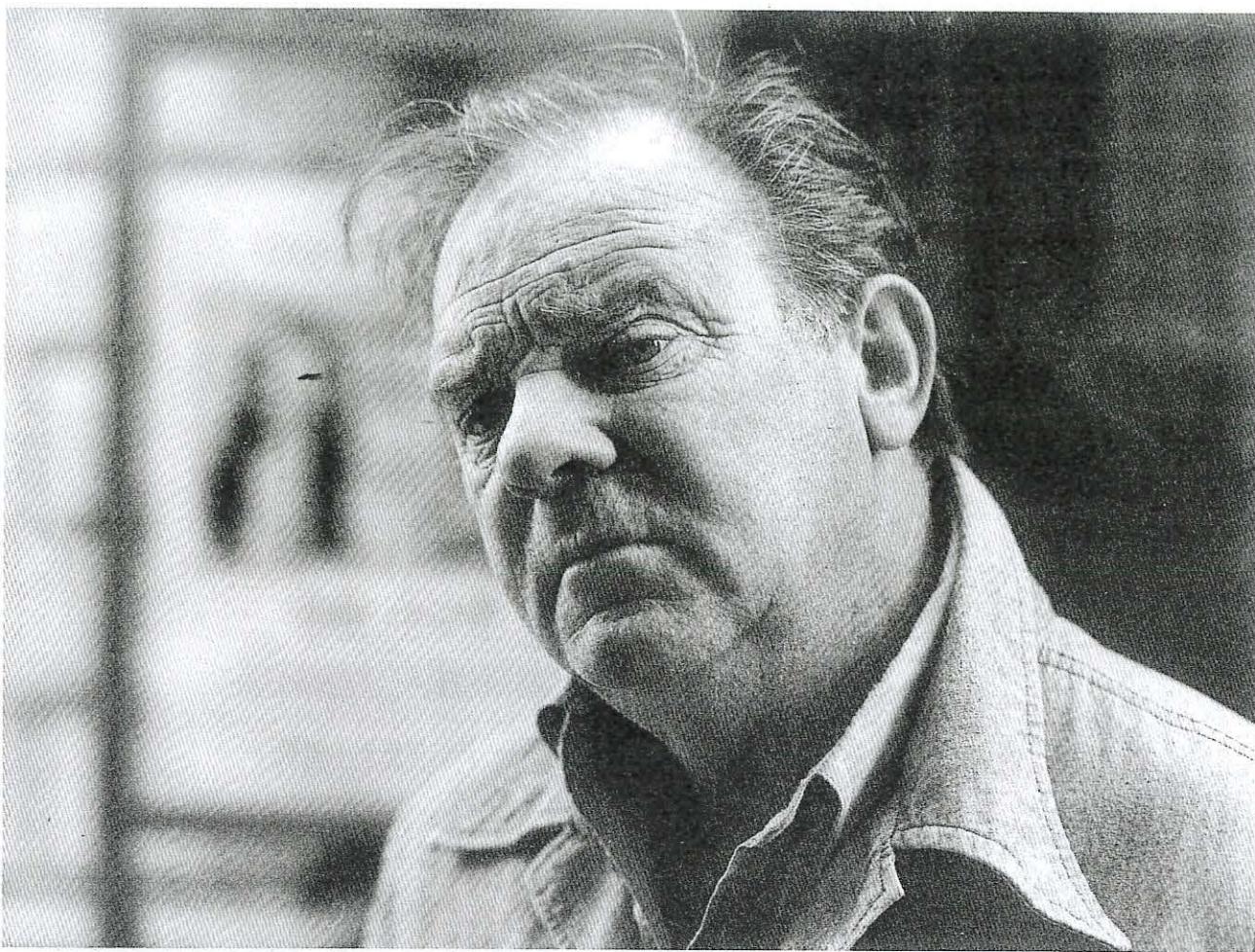
Običan var en kunstner med profil. Han eksperimenterede konstant med forskellige medier og opnåede her ved glimrende resultater.

Når han arbejdede, havde han ingen tålmodighed, men malede rastløst og hurtigt med brede, robuste strøg og anvendte klare, glødende og udtryksfulde farver, fulde af sang.

Mens han levede, åbenbaredes han sit talent indenfor kunst, forfatterskab og undervisning, ligesom han iværksatte forskellige usædvanlige projekter. Hans ideer og entusiasme forlenede ham med en udadvendt, opfindsom, charmerende og dynamisk personlighed, og hans optimisme og livsopfattelse inspirerede mange.

DEN KUNSTNERISKE STIL er særegen, en blanding af tradition, historie, legender, heltesagn og epos, afledt af folklore. Det er en glad stil, genkendelig, opmuntrende og snurrig.

EN FUGL optræder på næsten alle billederne. Den er Običans kendetegn og skildrer kærlighed, fred, frihed, skønhed og glæde.



JOVAN OBIČAN (1918 – 1986) was born in Cannes, France, of Yugoslav parents. From childhood on, Jovan practically devoted himself to art, scratching designs on mud pies when paper was unavailable. He trained with many important teachers and in many important styles. He finished his training, imbued with the spirit of his native country, the people, their legends, their philosophy. It has been said that his work has a “timeless quality” and a naive, child-like primitive style. **Običan** is identified with this style the world over, a style that is simple yet sophisticated; child-like yet masterfully adult; a style that tells a story with psychological, philosophical or sociological overtones. His funny little people are always colorful, always full of spirit, living with music and birds to bring them happiness. His fans and collectors are legion and include some of the most famous names in the world, from American presidents, senators, ambassadors and film stars to European nobility. He has exhibited all over the world and is represented in many galleries and collections. Jovan Običan always had a tremendous following of collectors and became internationally known by word of mouth and his frequent exhibits in the United States and Europe. His studio in Dubrovnik was a well-visited place, in effect an attraction to collectors and tourists. Though he spent a lot of time in America, he lived and worked in Dubrovnik.

Običan was a prolific artist, constantly experimenting in various medias, achieving masterful results.

When creating Jovan had no patience. He painted nervously, fast and in a hurry. He used wide and robust layers and chose clean glowing colors, full of sound.

During his lifetime he showed his talent in fine art, writing, teaching, lecturing and organizing various unusual projects. Ideas and enthusiasm in his projects brought him a gregarious, inventive, charming and dynamic personality. His optimism and comprehension of life gave inspiration to others.

THE ART STYLE is a unique one. It is a conglomerate of tradition, history, legends, hero tales, epics, old customs and a derivation of folklore. It is a self-standing style, recognizable, cheerful, whimsical and a happy creation.

A BIRD is practically in every work of art. The bird is like a trademark, it depicts love, peace, liberty, beauty and happiness.



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