



Róna 1997–2017

23 June – 29 October 2017

Prague City Gallery

The Stone Bell House

Staroměstské Square 13, Prague 1

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Sunday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Exhibition Curator: Olga Malá

Jaroslav Róna became known to the broader cultural public as a co-founder of the most important artistic association of the 1980s generation, The Obstinate Ones. Within this art group he developed into a distinctive original personality out of the box of the trends current at the time, as was convincingly evidenced by his first major solo exhibition organized in 1997 by Prague City Gallery at the Stone Bell House. Today – twenty years later – we are returning to Róna’s oeuvre in the same exhibition space.

The new exhibition, which maps the artist’s career since 1997, features sculptures and paintings created by him during the past twenty years. Through video installations, it also presents Róna’s realizations in the public space (the equestrian statue of *Courage – Jobst of Moravia* in Brno, 2015; the *Franz Kafka Monument* in Prague, 2003). The exhibition, which takes place in the year of Róna’s 60th birthday, focuses primarily on the works created during the above-mentioned period, but at the same time attempts to present Róna’s art with a certain visual and internally polarized integrity.

The exhibition shows continuity with the artist’s famous pieces of the “mythical” or “archetypal” style (*Creature II*, 1996; *Rhinoceros*, 2016), but also features the most recent sculptures, characterized by a more modest abstraction of form (*Astronomer*, 2014; *Flat Man*, 2016; *Lioness*, 2015).

From the beginning of his career Róna was primarily considered to be a painter. A turnaround in his work took place between 1992 and 1994, when he almost abandoned painting and focused mainly on sculpture. In addition to sculptures depicting war objects (*Reconnaissance Ship*, 1996; *Bomb Warehouse*, 1996) he began to create “architectons”. *Architectons* are small sculptures connected to cities and places inspired by the structures of labyrinths, fortresses and various ritual buildings, which look like archaeological finds and evoke the world of ancient and prehistoric cultures (*Ritual Structure*, 1992, *Arena*, 1996). They can be understood as “memories of the future” referring to places of previous catastrophic events, but perhaps also to those which are yet to come. In terms of theme they are bound to Róna’s paintings of apocalyptic visions of destruction and extinction of

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entire cities and civilizations (*Abandoned City*, 2009; *Town without a Name*, 2008). In his post-2000 works, the motif of destruction takes two different forms: the first one conceives of the Apocalypse in a mystical religious spirit (the embodiment of Satan's evil can be seen in the paintings *Fate of a Town* and *He Entered the Streets*, 2008; as well as in the sculpture *Devil Standing*, 2009), and is juxtaposed with the second, civilian, but nonetheless terrifying "Orwellian" technical version (paintings *Big Incinerator*, 2008; *Ingots*, 2014). In Róna's sculptures, the theme of the modern Apocalypse reaches its peak in the impressive "industrial" sculptures created this year and last year (*Factory*, 2017; *Archive*, 2017; *Ministry*, 2016), where it merges with Kafkaesque traumas from the loss of meaning of things and the absurdity of the world.

In addition to sculptures following the *architectons*, there is an almost parallel figurative line in Róna's oeuvre. As early as the beginning of the 1990s, the artist made the *Parable of the Swan* (1992), and a year later the *Parable of the Skull*. Both sculptures have a dioecious concept of their sculptural mass, which is also characteristic of other sculptures such as *David and Goliath* (2006), the design of the *Sigmund Freud Monument* (2006) as well as two older non-figurative compositions, *Creature II* (1996) and *Cuttlefish* (1998). Róna's top sculpture is the *Franz Kafka Monument* in Prague (2003), inspired by a scene from Kafka's novel, *Description of a Struggle*. This sculptural group consists of two male figures (the carrying one and the one being carried). Róna has managed to create a memorial of precisely balanced masses which is quite "memorable". In a successful synthesis he has linked the timeless sculptural concept with special accentuating features, creating an impressive ensemble that still attracts the attention of the local people of Prague and foreign visitors alike.

Of the works created in this century, two thematically accentuated ranges of paintings and sculptures stand out: the first refers to the fantastically exotic (the sculpture *African Seafarer* of 2011 and the painting *Heart of Darkness* of 2012); the second range consists of sci-fi sculptures that resonate with Orwellian motifs (*Vertical Robot*, 2013; *Ge – Man*, 2012; *Ge – Dog*, 2012). A new aspect of the artist's work is represented by large-scale painted metaphysical post-apocalyptic compositions. At first glance, they do not seem too dramatic because they give a rather nostalgic impression, but under their seemingly idyllic and childish motifs there lurk ominous tones of danger (for example, the children in the painting *Two Children on a Walk* of 2016 are wearing gas masks on their heads).

The inner continuity of Róna's art consists of coping with the phenomenon of evil. With his attitude, Róna belongs to the postwar generation of artists who reflected the previous tragic period, and in his early paintings he felt intimately related to members of the Italian trans-avant-garde and the German Neue Wilde group. Róna's art is pervaded with the theme of death, extinction and endless evil as a red thread, and is connected with the essential dilemmas of faith which the artist perceives pessimistically: "Evil is predominant in the world; God, as I imagine him, is not aware of evil..." At the same time, a more positive counterpart is constantly present in Róna's work. For example, it is represented by painting compositions expressing pleasure in the play of colors and shapes, light humorous and humanizing moments, and the theme of the victory of good over evil as personified by the monumental figure of *The Knight and the Dragon* (1995).

Olga Malá

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Venue: The Stone Bell House, Staroměstské Square 13, Prague 1

Term: 23 June – 29 October 2017

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Entrance Fee: CZK 120 full (adults) / CZK 60 reduced (students) / CZK 30 (senior citizens)

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ACCOMPANYING PROGRAM TO THE EXHIBITION:

Guided tours:

Tuesday, 4 July 2017, 6 p.m. – Curator-guided tour

Tuesday, 5 September 2017, 6 p.m. – Curator-guided tour

Tuesday, 3 October 2017 6 p.m. – Curator-guided tour

Saturday art workshops

Saturday, 30 September 2017, 1 p.m. – 6 p.m. **Mysterious Beings**, The Stone Bell House

Saturday, 21 October 2017, 1 p.m. – 6 p.m. **Imaginary Landscape**, The Stone Bell House

One of the possibilities of inspiration will be Jaroslav Róna's set of sci-fi sculptures. We will provide the surface of clay sculptures of fictitious animal beings and creatures with a specific décor, which will be created by means of imprints of various technical components, elements and items. In our artistic responses we will also reflect the visually dark character of Róna's paintings. We will paint with oils and dry pastels against the background of black paper. In this way, we will process ideas referring to the fantastic exoticism of mythical parallel worlds and apocalyptic landscapes.

Art workshops for adults and senior citizens

Sunday, 17 September 2017, 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. **Archetype and Myth in Sculptural Form I**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sunday, 1 October 2017, 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. **Archetype and Myth in Sculptural Form II**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sunday, 8 October 2017, 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. **The Multilayered Character of Painting I**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sunday, 15 October 2017, 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. **The Multilayered Character of Painting II**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Within the art workshop we will focus on Jaroslav Róna's sculpture and his characteristic mystical and archetypal style. We will be inspired by ancient, prehistoric cultures and fantastic exoticism. The participants will create a relief cast into plaster. They will try various methods of modeling with clay, such as working with spatula, carving or extruding and imprinting of small items. During the creative process they will deal with the sculptural motif, the ability to express their own ideas in relief and the volume of shapes and spatiality. In terms of form and content, we will also develop Jaroslav Róna's painting. We will concentrate on figurative motifs (half-figures with animal motifs, spectacular animal beings), let ourselves be inspired by Jaroslav Róna's approach, paintings, or themes of selected paintings. We will also deal with forms and possibilities of abstract stylization and play with colors and shapes.

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Interactive tours of the exhibition for all types of schools and other age and interest groups with the possibility of subsequent creative response in the form of their own work. We adapt the events in terms of time, theme and performance levels according to the specific requirements of each school.

Reservation required

Price: Children under 10, students of art schools, teachers – CZK 5; children over 10 years CZK 20

Contact Person: Lucie Haškovcová, lucie.haskovcova@ghmp.cz, 606 612 987, 608 216 418

In addition to the above-mentioned events, there will be other educational activities for other groups of visitors, such as the disadvantaged and parents on maternity and/or parental leave and their children.

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