

JOSEF ŽÁČEK: ANTICORPS

3 March 2017 – 18 June 2017

Prague City Gallery

Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Karlova Street 189/2, Prague 1

Admission free

Exhibition Curator: Magdalena Juříková

The latest works by Josef Žáček thematically run in different directions, uniting eventually in a single message. Their common platform is a quotation from the work of Konrad Paul Liessmann. The Austrian literary theorist and philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann describes the universe as the space of the everyday, which seems to be opposed to the freedom craved by society both historically and at present. Our environment is full of stereotypes, rituals and banalities related to the everyday needs of all of us. This has a far-reaching effect on society-wide phenomena. The title of the exhibition, **Anticorps** (from French; antibody, a protein complex neutralizing pathogens), expresses the artist's urge to activate an effective means for the resuscitation of our bodies, gasping for breath, in which we are forced to live. Since Liessmann does not want to be a mere moralist and offers a way out of everyday life via art, it is no coincidence that in Liessmann's essays Žáček seeks answers to the question of how to restore in our lives the dividing line between the mundane and real events, which used to be so tangible.

Stereotypes are everywhere around us. They infiltrate previously taboo or commemorative events. Terrorist acts have become an "ordinary" part of the course of life. As a result of social networking, we show our sympathy with the victims by a generally accepted model of behavior. Slogans *#Je suis...* *#Pray for...* are repeatedly used in connection with the outrageous acts around us in different locations and on different continents. The frequent (mis)use of this principle takes us away from a real experience, real empathy; the tragedy becomes commonplace, being accompanied by slogans which have lost their authenticity and sunk into banality. We give it an appropriate label and are done with the "issue" (*Untitled*, 2014–2015).

The mouth from a diptych entitled *Me* (2016), attacking us by its gigantic scale, is conceived of by the artist as a reference to the boundless self-presentation, which through millions of profiles throws out tons of mental waste to the constantly pulsating virtual universe. In a second they are being replaced by even more recent posts, which, with a few exceptions, reveal egocentricity and dreariness to an alarming extent.

The painting *Picture of the Day* (2013) was created after the first nerve gas attack in Ghouta, Syria on 21 August 2013. Under the title 'Picture of the Day', the media without hesitation published the tragic consequences of the sarin attack in a closeup of dozens of dead children. The photograph traveled around the world almost instantly, and, through its label which defined its 24-hour

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existence, ended in the fog of oblivion like all such events publicized in this way, regardless of their harrowing or completely neutral content. This creeping shift in the ethics of journalism and media ethics causes apathy instead of empathy. The way of presentation, without recognizing the nature of the information, leveling, streamlining reports from places of combat and terrorist attacks into sections with “quick navigation”, converts even a tragedy into a commonly consumed piece of news.

A series of imaginary portraits entitled *Numbers I – IV* (2015) responds to the immigration crisis within a broader context. A numbered individual is stripped of his/her unique identity, as represented by his/her name(s) and surname. But he/she is not only a number that distinguishes him/her from other refugees, but also a number which is part of the economic mechanism pragmatically registering a new workforce with the prospect of continued economic growth. Is it an ambivalence, two sides of the same coin, or is it hypocrisy? As early as in the womb, the fetus on an ultrasound image is given a number, as if in anticipation of its future role as an item in the economic balance which is the alpha and omega of the utilitarian mechanics of functioning in the modern world (*No. C121280, No. E947645*, 2016). Every day in the clear language of figures.

Seemingly endless is a series of canvases with monochromatic black flies (*Untitled*, 2015–2016) – the commonest and most irritating insect, which for Žáček embodies the everyday accentuated by Liessmann. Likewise one cannot effectively prevent pestering flies which stubbornly return back to your resting hand.

The diptych *Self-Portrait I, II* (2016) is gently ironic and puts our “angry man” in a different light. The point is that it does not feature a portrait, the face of the artist, but faithfully captures his lower limbs, which due to a minor anomaly cannot be taken for another person’s legs. Behind the humorous play with the genre there is also Žáček’s unwillingness to be seen and be identified; hiding behind symbols, metaphors and puns is more natural for him.

Josef Žáček was previously often identified as a religious artist. In his current paintings there does not seem to be any hint of Christian symbolism, perhaps in an attempt to get rid of this stereotype once and for all. Josef Žáček is the type of artist who conducts his polemics with the world and its twists and turns directly on the canvas, and whenever in the past angels and lambs appeared next to hyenas or birds, they have become symbols of the simple desire for truth and enlightenment without any connection to religion and its practice. On top of that, Josef Žáček arranges them into a series forming a conceptual unit in order to provide them with a hallmark of obviousness with which they shall accompany us every day, if possible.

Magdalena Juříková

Josef Žáček was born in 1951 in Prague. In the years 1977–1983 he studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. His most recent exhibition took place at DOX in 2011. He exhibited abroad, e.g., in Los Angeles, Lisbon, Berlin, Bonn, Washington and Rotterdam; in 1992 his works were included in the exhibition “Light and Spirit” at the Pavilion of Art at EXPO in Seville, Spain. He collaborated with the Gallery Behémót; in 2010 the Aspect Gallery in Brno published his extensive monograph with texts by Jiří Machalický, Richard Drury, Ivan M. Jirous and Milan Kozelka. He was granted the *Revolver Revue* Award for 2014. Paintings by Josef Žáček can be found in a number of public collections (National Gallery in Prague, Gallery of Fine Art in Roudnice nad Labem, North Bohemian Gallery of Fine Arts in Litoměřice, East Bohemian Gallery in Pardubice) as well as private collections both at home and abroad. He lives and works in Prague.

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Venue: Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace, Karlova ulice 189/2, Prague 1

Term: 3 March 2017 – 18 June 2017

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission free

Contact Person for Journalists: Michaela Vrchatová, +420 725 818 721, vrchatova@ghmp.cz

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ACCOMPANYING PROGRAM:

Guided tours

Guided tour with Josef Žáček and Magdalena Juříková: Wednesday, 5 April 2017, 5:30 p.m.

Artist-guided tour with Josef Žáček: Wednesday, 10 May 2017, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday art workshops

Saturday, 20 May 2017, 1 p.m.–6 p.m. **Intimate Self-Portrait**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Saturday, 3 June 2017, 1 p.m.–6 p.m. **Daily Rituals**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Josef Žáček's large-scale metaphorical paintings will become an impulse for the visitors both in terms of form and content to create their own art. We will focus, among other things, on Žáček's interpretation of the manipulation through mass media. We will develop the theme of self-portrait, but like the artist himself we will deliberately avoid trying to depict the external likeness in favor of rendering personal attributes, inner experiences and the memories of man. Through the representation of banal objects and everyday situations we will illustrate in various ways testimonies of our everyday reality.

The Saturday workshops are intended for children, families with children and other interested parties of all ages, including the elderly and disadvantaged. The arrival and departure is optional – i.e., whenever within the scheduled time.

Sunday art workshops for adults and senior citizens

Sunday, 7 May 2017, 3 p.m.–6 p.m. **Expression of Signs in the Image**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sunday, 21 May 2017, 3 p.m.–6 p.m. **Action as a Repetition of a Symbol**, Education Center, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Within the artistic responses, we will focus on Josef Žáček's means of expression – signs, symbols, silhouettes or shadow outlines. The artist's urgency, hidden in his chosen motifs and the character of his painting, will be an inspiration for the participants in the workshop for the expression of their subjective experiences, for which they will choose their own expression using acrylic paint or colored inks. On the second level we will focus on finding ways how to represent the restlessness and constant happening that takes place in our everyday lives. We will try to build images into a conceptual whole by their serial arrangement or repetition of selected topics.

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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