

KNIHY OFF-LINE

ART-TICKLES

Jan B. Hurych

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How it happened that ArtForum met Hurontaria.

I guess everyone was once in similar situation. You are attempting to achieve something and while you are trying all there is, you just cannot start the things going. And when you don't know what else to do, you decide to try an experiment which you don't really believe in, but there is simply nothing better at hand. And suddenly, your troubles are over. It was exactly such gathering of coincidences that got together the virtual gallery *ArtForum* in Prague and Jan Hurych, the countryman who is the publisher of the web-magazine *Hurontaria*, somewhere on the shores of Huron Lake.

It happened last year in spring when we at ArtForum just ended the cycle of virtual exhibitions of Czech graphic artists and were ready to start the one with glass artists. We felt that the profiles of artists - some of whom played the same role in art as did Jágr, Navrátilová and Železný in the world of sport - should be complemented with some convenient texts. The problem of course was that we had only a vague idea what should such texts contain. So we turned to several kunsthistorians and newspapermen and asked them to try their hands on Internet. Some of them refused right away, the others promised, but subsequently disappeared without a trace.

As it became obvious that we wouldn't find convenient "reviewer" right here, in Czech Republic, we told ourselves we should try it abroad. So we sent e-mails to our countrymen who contributed regularly to Czech periodicals. We were surprised that many of them not only answered, but some of them were even willing to cooperate with some unknown gallery, hundreds and thousands of miles far away from them. We agreed they send us the samples of their texts and after two weeks, the situation became quite clear. The text written by Jan was exactly what we needed. Ever since, every month we have been looking forward to read his *Art-tickles* (as he calls them), all of us - that is our artists, the friends of the gallery and even the readers of Czech Internet periodicals (*Neviditelný Pes*, *iDnes*).

We hope these essays by Jan, published here in non-traditional, electronic form of book, will talk to their readers as well as they did when they accompanied and introduced to the world of Internet our Czech glass-making elite of artists.

Petr Kraus,
Director of the Virtual Gallery ArtForum,
Prague, Czech Republic
<http://www.gallery.cz>

I would like to dedicate this book to all Czech glass-makers whose works of art are the best ambassadors of Czech nation I have ever met,

Jan B. Hurych,
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Kincardine, Canada

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REFLECTIONS

(Marian Karel, The Geometry of Mirages)



Glass, the *glossy glass*. I am almost positive that those two words have, beside the inherent linguistic link, also some other mutual connections: *geometrical, optical and artistic*. The last one is easy to prove: professor Marian Karel - artist, architect and teacher, all in one person - has already done that.

First: *geometry*. He gives his works simple names: *Triangle, Square, Cube, Pyramid, Cylinder, Prism*. But do not expect the old Euclidean space - for instance, his square has three dimensions. Elsewhere, his transparent glass creates objects similar to *holograms* and gives the impression that you see them from many directions at the same time. And true, triangle has three angles, but they also change,

depending on your angle of view. And his prism defies gravity, being held in the air by some unknown force . . .

Then - *optics*. The artist knows it very well and he can harness it in his creations. But don't believe everything your eyes are telling you: *there is more than meets the eye*. In one place, our eyes can penetrate the matter while from another one we can only see what's behind us. And suddenly, we feel like trapped in not just three-, but multi-dimensional world. The space is expanding and our familiar reality is no more. It all suddenly gets new meaning thanks to light projections, reflections and transparencies. Glass is, after all, very much like water: sometimes transparent to great depth, sometimes only reflective like some lake at sunset. But contrary to frozen water, there is a life in glass. Just look closer: aren't those reflections suddenly moving?

Third connection - *art*. Not only shapes, light and space, but colors too. And unlimited combination of all that. Our illusionist is performing his miracles and like in the magic show, we wonder if it is "*all done by mirrors only*". But glass art of professor Karel does not stop there - he adds another important dimension: the beauty itself. His objects are not isolated in space: they are sitting in gardens, hang in Gothic halls, shine in streets, reflect the walls of an old castle corridor and enhance the majesty of medieval piazza in Venice. They fit there too, and why not - after all, art is timeless. Look closer and you may even see the ghosts of yesteryear. They are probably as curious as you are. And while watching all that, we have to ask: where is the object and where is the image? Where does our reality ends and the mirage starts? Or could it be there they are only two images of the same thing?

Karel's objects of art are of course more than just decorative art, they not only complement their

surroundings - they give them new meanings, new functions, new beauty. No wonder Mr. Karel successfully exhibits all around the world, looking for new settings while experimenting with new ideas and techniques: molten glass, metallurgical glass, etched glass, glass flat or curved, reflection glass, and some steel, wood, you name it. And I bet he uses yet something else: a special magic.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_04/Ramec.html

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THE WORLDS AROUND US

(The exhibition of Dana Zamecnikova)



Ever since people left Eden, settled on Earth and started to multiply, the mankind was facing the puzzling duality: the unity of the universe but also the differences between its components, mainly between people. We are equal, but we are not the same. We live different lives, have different interests, suffer different pains. Still our lives have many things in common: for instance the beginning and the end, the birth and death. And in between, we may feel pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, we can fall in love and be loved in return. But the pain and pleasure are only two sides of the same coin, the unity in duality.

Observing the art of Dana Zamecnikova - the architect, painter and pedagogue - one cannot help seeing those contrasts: her pictures are expressing them through their composition, form and content - and several of them even by their dual names. Sometimes the contrast is more than obvious, like in *Divided world* of the man

and woman. They both live together, but they are worlds apart. Once there was a unity between them, the *liaison* between *a man and wife*. Yes, they are still married, but estranged; they live in different worlds - partly by nature, but mostly by choice. Once she was a lovely *bride* and he was a loving groom, but their worlds somehow drifted apart.

The woman's world - how little we men know about it, how much we underestimate it! And yet, it is as much interesting, as much beautiful as the world of man, even more so. Different? Yes, by all means. Woman can place more importance on things she is sharing with her man: her *family*, her children, her home and things around, but also her happiness or sorrow, *laughs* or tears and yes, her love too. Her world is not *upside down*, it is just more feminine. And she wants to share it with her partner - every woman has a *secret wish* to turn him into a man of her dreams. But she seldom succeeds, sometimes it is more like a *conversation with a fish*. Their worlds are only partly overlapping and so the life of a woman is not easy. No wonder she dreams about better world: more beautiful, more romantic, more cordial. After all, those are the things *women* understand better than men do.

"All the world is a stage", said Bill Shakespeare and we are only actors on that glorified *Theatrum Mundi*. The artist knows it and so we can see ourselves in her pictures not the way we want to be, but the way we are - dressed in costumes, but naked underneath, with painted faces, but under those masks each of us has his own face.

Paintings on glass, created by Mrs. Zamecnikova and exhibited in many places all around the world, are dynamic and inventive. Amazing, yes, but also agitating our thoughts. Who are we and

why are we so different? Do we sincerely want to reach out to the other people worlds, those of our loved ones, our friends or even those of complete strangers? Do we have enough of sympathy, enough compassion? Can we look close enough or deep enough to recognize the beauty, which is sometimes only in the eyes of beholder?

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_05/Ramec.html

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THE CAPTIVATING BEAUTY OF FRAGILITY

(The exhibition of Prof. Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova)



makers are Zelezny Brod and Novy Bor, the places which are intimately known to artists Prof. Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova.

I was still a young student when my friend Werner took me with him to see the glass-works in Dolni Polubny. He worked there as a glass-blower and it was my first acquaintance with molten glass. It looked to me like a marvel: to work with something which flows like a fudge in the mixing machine of some candy store, radiates heat and glows, requiring the supreme skill of an artisan-artist. Later, I also saw the casting in forms, drawing glass rods in Josefodol (for making glass buttons) and glass-cutting in Albrechtice, Jizerske Mountains. But the real capitals of glass-

I have a confession to make: I fancy glass, I admire glass, I love glass. And I also have a great respect for those who can create the objects of art from glass - it does require very special talents. Glass is the material unlike any other - it has its own life. Get it wrong and you never make it into an object of beauty. Glass is neither solid nor liquid, its molecules are in non-crystal disorder, but have enough cohesion to produce mechanical rigidity. One really has to understand this "frozen liquid" to be able to enhance its qualities. Add to it the transparency, reflectiveness, the smoothness or coarseness of the surface, its crystal look-alikeness and you get other ingredients of the real glass magic.

Get it wrong and you can only spoil it. Glass is also plastic when it is molten, so we can cast it, press it, draw it, blow it, and roll it. You can embellish it when it is cold: cut it, carve it, engrave or etch it, sandblast it, paint it, polish or guild it and I am sure there are still other methods both artists have up in their sleeves - some of them invented by their own ingenuity. All it takes is to get it right, right?

Well, it sounds simple, until you try it. After you handle the difficult techniques, you still have to force your design onto this elusive material. The result is what is sometimes inaccurately called *a decorative art*. Inaccurately, because it is also used for beautification, enriching, illuminating, prettification, synthesization, complementation and accentuation of the otherwise lifeless environment. What's more: those objects are the art of its own. Each has its story to tell: the beauty we can see, the surface we can touch, shape we can feel, the idea we can grasp.

The masterpieces of both artists who have been already working together for quite a long time, are

demonstrating not only the amazing use of advanced, innovative techniques, but also their sense of composition, insight for shapes, space, color and transparency - something we laymen would probably call "an excellent taste" for the lack of the right word. Prof. Libensky a Jaroslava Brychtova thus bring up an old tradition of Czech (Bohemian) glass, raise it up to a new level and spread it all around the world in their exhibitions.

But the glass is also a very fragile thing: like a dream or distant melody. So are the designs of our artists - charming and gentle. No wonder we are attracted to them: every one of us would like to own such little wonder, the object of captivating beauty and fragility, something which looks like it is made - well, made of glass.

Surprisingly, glass is actually produced (more or less) from sand, the most common material on earth. And come to think of it, it contains silicon and we make computer chips from it, too. It looks like the mankind came a long way: from playing with sand-castles to producing objects of usefulness and of a real beauty.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_06/Ramec.html

IN PRAISE OF ROUND OBJECTS

(The exhibition of Miluse Roubicková - Kytkova and Rene Roubicek)



The world was created as a round one - well, I do not mean just the Earth itself or stars and planets; we can see the roundness everywhere. True, there are some straight lines and flat planes, but as our mathematicians are telling us, those are only the special cases. Nothing in the world is actually *that* straight. So why not indulge in the roundness, its curvatures and the multitudes of shapes we have in store? And if you really want to go for a treat, see the collection of glass artworks of *Miluse Roubickova - Kytkova and Rene Roubicek*. They are, by the way, already the third married couple of "artists in glass" I am writing here about. I wonder - could it be there is some special attractive force in glass which our physicists somehow missed?

Many years of working and exhibiting around the world made this couple the inseparable part of Czech glass tradition and

rightly so. But if you ask me what artistic style or school they followed, I could hardly put my finger on it, probably because there is so much originality in their work which resists any usual pattern. But one thing strikes me immediately first sight: the roundness of their sculptures and objects - they not only have curvatures, they enhance them, they magnify them. It is partly because they use two techniques which create mostly the curved shapes: molded glass and blown glass. Both techniques are probably the oldest ways of forming the glass and it takes a lot of inspiration to be able to come up with something new and strikingly beautiful. They are also very difficult methods, but the results are well worth the efforts.

Of course here their similarity ends: molding is the technology for creating mostly massive, heavy objects, which are impressing us more with their weight, their three-dimensions. yes, the beauty of melted glass, frozen in the solid shape. Looking at it, we can still imagine it as a flowing liquid, filling the form through its streams, folds and ripples, and settling down by its own weight.

Blown glass, on the other hand, is nothing but a shell "full of air" and looks like some bubbles, balloons or what not. We are seduced by its lightness - it seems to be suspended in the air, ready to fly away with the wind. Well, they are so fragile we may be even trying to hold our breath in order not to blow them away. Many times I was watching the glass-masters to create the blown glass and every time I was amazed and impressed. Like a balloon, the melted shell of hot glass was slowly growing as the glass-maker blew into it, but at the same time it had also a trend to bend down by the gravitation. There is a remedy, of course: you have to spin it, straighten it, keep it moving in right direction, sometime using wooden "shaper" to give it the proper shape. When I watched it, it

all looked so easy - until I tried it, of course.

And if you try to do this for many years, you may eventually acquire not only the necessary skill, but also the feeling for "the soul of glass" which is somewhere in there, you just have to break the magic spell to get it out. The artists Miluse Roubickova - Kytkova and Rene Roubicek know all about it. They use other techniques as well: cut glass, flat glass, make chandeliers, artistic windows and others. But I was enchanted mostly with the round shapes: tempting me to touch them, to feel them, to squeeze them. So much they reminded me the beautiful, living objects on this well rounded world. You may guess which of those glassy objects I liked most - of course, those which represent parts of woman's body, so smooth, so beautiful. So nicely round.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_07/Ramec.html

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THE SPACE FOR CONTEMPLATION

(The exhibition of Vaclav Cigler)



Recently, my friend asked me a curious question: how do I find out what is the particular object of art supposed to mean? Well, I am not trying to find *that* and these essays are not some kind of explanations of "what did the artist have in mind by this". That is not the way I am reacting to art. No, I am looking for *my* impressions, *my* comprehension, *my own* - shall we say - absorption of it. Am I being too self-centered? Not at all! I am the "receiver" and I have a *personal* interest in the message the art is

conveying to *me*. And so what I write are rather free associations and not a recipe what should one see in the art in question. And God forbid - I do not intend to spell any suggestions what *you yourself* should think. If anything, it may start you thinking in *your own* direction, which is perfectly all right with me.

Describing art in words is difficult, some might even say impossible. Especially some art - like the works of Mr. Vaclav Cigler. Well, if I knew how to do it, I would rather get hold of brush or maybe write a poem, compose a short musical piece or use other artistic means which leave more space for imagination. But words? Or to paraphrase Hamlet whose author said it long time before me and three times better: "Words, words, words!".

I have here one confession to make. I always thought that music is some special kind of art - so volatile and elusive. Now you hear it and now you don't, only the impression remains. You have to admit that it has a very difficult task to make a really lasting impression. It is also time dependent: it has the beginning, parts are in sequences and also the end. Painters, sculptors and similar artists - I thought - have it easy: the objects of their work are static. They are here to stay and you can see them, turn them around and study them at your leisure, any time - all the time.

Well, music is the special kind of art, but otherwise I was wrong. Those artists do not have it easier and neither have we, the viewers. There are artistic objects, which are dynamic, more like being alive, strange as it may seem to be. Every time you see them again, they tell you something different, something new. Needless to say, the works of Mr. Cigler are like that. They almost evolve in front of your eyes, reminding you what your last impression was and giving you, almost as a bonus, another, deeper insight. It's like if your eyes are opening wider and wider and the process never ends.

And to make it even more difficult, Mr. Cigler uses the most elusive material - glass, all special

properties it possesses and through many technologies available. I already admitted here my weakness, my adoration of objects made of glass. Maybe it is because they can also mesmerize, combine the optical effects with the message itself, mix the context with the style and form, all that in order to create the multi-dimensional meaning. Yes, all those dimensions the artist leaves for you and me, in order to exercise our own thinking. I guess that's what the real art is all about, after all.

And what's more: his objects never are only what they seem to be. It is thanks to his art - the art so much impressive, because it does not present the ideas in simplistic way - that Vaclav Cigler is well known around the world. His many exhibitions as well as his lifetime work are outstanding examples of the effect he made on us, the "receivers". His is not an easy art, it requires from us to find the right "frequency" and fine tune-up, but whoever said that it was going to be easy? In our world, so over-filled with ready-to made manuals or "cook-books" for everything, it is refreshing to see that the artist believes in real values, the ideas in our minds. The values, which are not-so-easy to come by and therefore so much more precious.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_08/index.html

THE GIFT OF BEAUTY

(The exhibition of Bohumil Elias)



I remember how I was once, long time ago, thinking how would I describe the meaning of *beauty*, that is without going into some long definitions. True, any Thesaurus would give me a handful of "equivalent words", starting from *..adorable, aesthetic, attractive...* and ending with *... stunning, sublime and tasteful*. Any of those words gives me only one feature of beauty and each would be missing a lot; so best thing I could do was to put them all together and wrap it around with ribbon marked "*beauty*". No, I

wanted something different, something closer to *real* nature of beauty, something common to all kinds of beauty . . .

I haven't succeeded then, but many years later, after I have written more pages in the book of my life, it came to me like it was always there - apparently I just couldn't see it before. It happened on my birthday. I was walking through the forest and once a while I stopped, and amidst the deep silence, I watched the trees and sky, all those colors and shades. I suddenly realized how wise and profound harmony was all around me. It was like a magnificent church, created by the best of all artists, and it was there all for me, for us, for eternity. I realized what a beautiful present it was, the best I ever got. And there you have it: I believe the beauty is simply *a gift*. The gift from somebody who created it for us, terrestrials, and we should all comprehend it and appreciate it. Unfortunately, only some can while others can't and the whole gift is somehow lost on them.

Nothing less than *beauty* strikes me like an appropriate word for the art of Bohumil Elias. He has a gift to think out the beauty and pass it on to us. Be it painted glass, the glass of strange yet admirable shapes, with colors which complement and provoke our thoughts at the same time, abstract paintings with very concrete meanings. The beauty, which is at the same time also *...adorable, aesthetic, attractive...* and *.... stunning, sublime and tasteful*. Simply because his art is all that.

The old English saying says. "The beauty is in the eye of beholder", meaning that we all have different ideas about beauty. I beg to differ: the beauty has to be first in artist's mind, then in his hands and eventually realize itself in the object of art. Then and only then can we, the beholders, finally watch it and appreciate it. And while we may differ in our opinions, one thing is for sure: most of us can recognize the real beauty.

And like that forest, so quiet and yet talking to me, so is the art of Mr. Elias. It talks in several

levels - depending how much we can understand it - but all that talk is in one, universal language. That's why he is internationally recognized, all over the world. Yes, each of us can comprehend his art differently, but it's impact on us is the same. Be it painted glass, mixed media, stained glass or paintings, they all talk to our special sense - call it the seventh sense - the sense of beauty. They all show same kind of harmony, so much that one can almost hear the distant, lovely music in the background.

You see, all that confirms my theory: here is an artist who has a gift he is sharing with us. As he would know that there is never enough beauty in our everyday life - the beauty which knows how to redirect our eyes from our everyday problems, pains, worries and disappointments. The artist is giving us another insight in our troubles, same way as if we are looking through the glass and see the other side, the brighter one. Yes, we need some hope, we need some assurances, that there is something else in this world, something satisfying and pleasing. Something like a beautiful gift.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_09/index.html

THE ART OF FIGHTING

(The exhibition of Vladimir Kopecky)



No art comes easy to life - otherwise it wouldn't be the real art. The way the artists deal with their problems are however many and quite different. Some are just patiently waiting for their inspiration, others prefer to provoke it. Some finalize all their designs in their heads - like Mozart did, the other - like Beethoven - write many versions and eventually throw them away, except for one, the *right one*. Some are diligently working their way up as a careful builder does, block by block. Still others are fighting with ideas until they get it right.

I assume prof. Vladimir Kopecky is one of those fighters. That was the first idea which popped in my mind when I was watching his works. Here is the artist who struggles for accurate expression, for perfect formulation and realization of

his ideas. Don't get me wrong, he is not stressing every single detail neither is he extremely punctilious, nothing like that. It is just that he wants to get his message through and he surely does. But to achieve that, he had to try hard - his message is not the easy one. That is because the language of art is not an easy one to learn: his piece of art does not come with any manual, there are no passages to memorize or quick steps to apply. We just have to *feel our way through*. Maybe that's why it touches us so deeply and suddenly, we feel like we are a part of it.

Of course the artist does not make it for us any easier either: there are no clichés, no indebtedness to foreign influences, no obvious or less obvious tricks. There is no question that's also the main reason why he is so famous around the world. His works appeared in many international exhibitions, for instance Expos 58, 67 and 92, and got many rewards. It is the artists like him who made Czech Republic a real superpower - at least in the art of glass.

His materials are not exactly stereotypical: yes, there is glass, metal, wood, but also railway tiles, even bricks. Neither are the techniques: painting, forming, arranging, assembling and what not - I even suspect his atelier has many tools of everyday life, probably more than many of us ever had. And why not? After all, there is some art in everything, all we have to find it and to "turn it the right side up". Eskimo sculptors claim that their creatures, be it people or animals, were already inside the stone and they just chiseled off the excess material. Or - if you prefer - they liberated them. And the result of such "liberation process" of prof. Kopecky is striking: it is a kind of beauty you can't see anywhere else. It is not always apparent at first view, but believe me, it is there. Yes, a stroke of genius, but also many hours of hard work before it became what it is.

The way professor Kopecky chose to "liberate" his pieces of art is not the easy one, it may be even disturbing for some people. Not everyone appreciates being reminded of the realities of our life. The life which as we all know, is not easy either: it has its ups and downs, moments of joy and sorrow. The moments of discoveries and moments of disappointments. One thing is for sure: our mankind reached this stage of development mostly because of its fighters: in science, in technology and in art.

It past, it was not easy to live and it is not much easier in this time. It is good to have around the artist like Vladimir Kopecky, who can remind us that the life is not only worth living, but also worth fighting. As one Czech poet said: "He, who stopped for a while, soon stays aside." There is no accident that prof. Kopecky's work looks like some celebration of vertical lines - in many of his works - they represent his urge to aim higher and better. Nothing less would be worth living.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_10/index.html

FACE TO FACE

(The exhibition of Prof. Jiri Hrcuba)



One member of famous *Canadian Group of Seven* once said that when it comes to painting trees, he preferred the old, weather-beaten ones. When asked why, he explained that they had their own "character" or "personality". I guess it is the same with people if we look at their faces. We are all born as cute little babies, loved and cherished - according to Mark Twain, there is only *one* most beautiful child in the whole world and *every* mother has it. Babies with faces blank like a fresh sheet of paper, because there is no history there - yet. As we grow older, life is molding our features and our soul as well. Like a skilled sculptor, it fills our visage with wrinkles and scars, the un-erasable evidence of our passions and pains, the memory bank

of our past.

But we can find much more in our faces, too. We all know that there are people who have interesting faces and others who appear - and mostly are - rather dull. We can only wonder what makes some faces more attractive than others, why some fill us with sympathies and others make us shudder. I am not talking about physical beauty or ugliness here, only about that "something" we all can perceive but can hardly understand. If you ask an artist, he would probably talk about different kind of perception or as it is sometimes called, the "inner" beauty.

When we look at portraits of celebrities done by prof. Jiri Hrcuba, we can understand that difference without any need for explanation. I can see how - and especially why - he chose his objects: he simply couldn't not to. The temptation was probably too much: those were the faces which had to be captured and kept for posterity. It was also quite challenging, even for a very skilled portraitist such as himself. Their faces had a lot to say and so had he. And he did it, in many places and all around the world - in his exhibitions or as a pedagogue.

It probably took a lot of studies for each portrait - it is not easy to grasp the substance of a complicated person, not in short time, anyway. True, his objects were all famous artists, writers and others who contributed to our cultural heritage; their deeds were well known from their works and their faces from their photographs. But one cannot just use all this in the portrait - not directly, anyway. One can utilize some gentle hints in the background, but only as complements, since the real center of attention was and always will be the face itself. To catch and preserve the personality of the person, one has to be able not only to read the face and thoroughly understand it - he also has to add much more, the artistic touch, the magic, if you will.

Talking about difficulties: the art of portraits has certain rules to follow - mainly, we should be able to recognize that person. Too much stress on individual features could turn it into caricature. Next to those general rules stand other requirements: the individual characteristics, the real insight into personality and how to convert the artist's point of view into his work. And there are also those "little details", which, according to Michelangelo, the perfection must consist of.

Then comes the final problem: the realization of portrait - the form, the content, the style. And choice of material: would it be the medal made of metal or a portrait in clay or maybe a face cut in glass? Glass is of course very difficult material - I know, I know, I said it here before - but it is also an excellent choice: no other material can give a portrait such superb three-dimensional appearance. Needless to say, Prof. Hrcuba is an excellent craftsman and quite skilled in all those techniques. Just imagine one of difficulties: the faces cut in glass are actually "negatives", space-wise if you know what I mean. But the results are stunning: they look like they are emerging from somewhere which gives them the touch of extreme reality, but also a mystery no less.

The one question of course is how far can artist go in his attempt to express *his* understanding of the person. The response can be seen in works of prof. Hrcuba: they have the beauty of their own, not only the one for our eyes, but also the "inner one", few steps deeper. Look at those faces and you are immediately struck with uncommon harmony and grace. We can see the artist asked himself the very same question and he also found the answer. Then he turned it into a beautiful piece of art - telling it to us all, literally "face to face".

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_11/index.html

THE ART OF LIVING GLASS

(The exhibition of Petr Novotny)



As a boy, I often visited our cottage in Jizerské Mountains in Northern Bohemia, the place with rich glass-making tradition. True, it was mostly utility glass, but it was made everywhere and there was at least one glass hut in every village, making molded, pressed or "blown" glass objects. Our neighbour worked in Josefodol's hut, pulling glass rods out of glass balls, the rods which were then used for manufacturing of buttons. Even our cottage alone was former glass-cutting shop, for grinding and polishing glass chandeliers that "enlightened" the halls all over Europe. The grinding disks were turned by a water driven paddle-wheel, as large as those of former water mills.

But the real miracles were created in Polubný, where my friend Werner was employed as a glass blower. I admired his skills, not only the way he handled the red-hot glass but also the glasses of beer, which disappeared in his thirsty throat without having any

negative effect on his work. On the contrary: apparently all workers there were drinking and no wonder - it was so hot there that it was like a preview of the place we sinners may expect to go when we leave this sorrowful world. But in spite of that, those guys were creating something quite contrary, quite *heavenly*: vases, bowls, glasses and bottles, goblets, candlesticks and what not, periodically blowing into hollow rods (called *whistles*) with the bubble of melted glass at the end. Once a while they applied to it some wooden form for shaping the glass bubble. They were demonstrating something I would never forget: *the art of living glass*. Yes, their "whistles" were performing rather complicated dances in the air, to keep the bubble "alive", once a while blowing in it, then spinning it again, so it would develop symmetrically and wouldn't "overflow" or get deformed. And the crimson colored glass was suddenly so obedient, so peaceful - it looked meek like a ball of wax, tempting you to touch it and feel it. Of course, those were my impressions from a distance only - when I came closer, I fully realized the "red-hot" reality.

How difficult work it was I understood only later when I tried it myself in small scale, at home. Only then I got the real feel of what is going on in melted glass. It became so soft that I succeeded to spoil most of what I did - it just wanted a gentle hand and the experience to control it - neither of which I really possessed.

Moreover, glass is not forgiving - wrong move, too much or too little force and that's it - another opportunity is wasted. There is something indescribable in creating the art from the matter continuously moving, something like a hot fudge, always ready to freeze when there is not enough of heat. It is probably due to this feature that objects made of blown glass look like they are still

moving. Like if we do not see only one frame of the movie, but one frame at the time instead, thus creating the illusion of movement. Somehow we believe that the object *is* actually moving, so dynamic it seems, so full of energy. It is because what we see is a real composite of so many past moves, forms and operations applied during the process.

With all respect to those artisans I mentioned before, there is only few real Masters among masters, few Artists among artists. One of them is undoubtedly *Petr Novotny*. Of course I am not alone with this opinion, he is known, recognized and appreciated all around the world. He is one of few who really know how to make the glass move the way they want it. Of course the glass is revolting - it wants something else: to flow down, to satisfy the laws of gravity and eventually peacefully freeze all over. In order to conquer this resistance, our master has to use all kinds of tricks, the secrets of trade they call them. He has to be like a lion tamer who knows his beasts, like a sculptor who knows his material, like a gentle lover who knows his partner. All that has to be done in continuous movement - yes, there can be no idle moment, no wasted move and if that would not be enough, it has to be performed in one precise order.

And the results are stunning: the beauty, which is out of this world - the astonishing, heavenly beautiful pieces created in the vicinity of the red-hot hellhole of melted glass. The gentle, fragile objects of Peter Novotny are all created in sweat and exertion. It is the real *art of living glass*, the beauty of the move and *on the move*.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/1999_12/index.html

THE THIRD EYE OF AN ARTIST

(The exhibition of Jaromir Rybak)



When I was browsing through photographs of Mr. Rybak's exhibition in ArtForum gallery, I was attracted by the strange name "*Hatteria*". Well, I was not sure about its meaning so I looked in some encyclopedias and here you have it:

"Hatteria (Hatteria punctata), a New Zealand lizard, which, in anatomical character, differs widely from all other existing lizards. It is the only living representative of the order Rhynchocephala.

Being of investigative nature myself, I also wanted to know how much it "differed", but for that I had to look in my best source of wisdom - the Net itself. And true enough, I have found something very interesting about this creature: this lizard has on its head an organ, called

"the third eye", more like an opening, which can sense light and maybe some other signals. It is apparently a remnant of an additional, truly sixth sense, which later in other species became the internal part of brain, so called *epiphysis cerebri*. So we people have it too and our ancestors believed that there was the true location of human soul. I also recalled a book by Lopsang Rampa, "The Third Eye", which contains a quasi-Tibetan philosophy of some sort and *the third eye* also appeared in theosophical books of Madame Blavatsky who believed that our Earth was once inhabited by three-eyed Cyclops.

Needless to say, I do not subscribe to either of those theories. As far as I am concerned - if there is something we should call "the third eye" - it is the eye of an artist who could see what we don't, who has can view things differently through his imagination. Such eye being just another "sense", the one I would call *a sense of art*. Like the one presented in Jaromir Rybak art works. The eye which can discover the strange beauty in the combination of metal and glass - the strong and the fragile. The combination which is attracting by contrasts: the robustness next to gentleness. However, they also complement each other and when you look at it, you realize that one without the other would be surely missing something. The artist is matching those two different materials to create something new, something beautiful. Not a compromise, but rather enrichment. Like precious stone set in metal, his artwork is multiplying its value, its meaning.

In his art, Mr. Rybak devoted a whole chapter to cold-blooded animals, probably because they all represent for us some mysterious qualities; well, to me they do, anyway. His *Atlants* are carrying something larger than the Earth and Heaven together - our never ending quest for beauty. Quest

one can see everywhere in Mr. Rybak's creations. For instance in *The Touch of Love* where gentle tentacles come out of the restless sea to raise up the jewel of beauty, or in *Expectation* where the modern world of sprockets matches the simple yet more beautiful shape of glass bowl., or as a *Table of resting* which is like a living proof of the beauty which is "within".

As the saying goes, "many were called, but only few were chosen". Yes, only those who can see with their third eye can really watch and sense the world of beautiful things. The eye which is not penetrating, but compassionate, not piercing, but gently peeking behind the curtain separating us from the world of things truly amazing . . .

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/2000_01/Ramec.html

IN PRAISE OF CONCAVITY

(The exhibition of Jaroslav Matous)



I guess it was our professor of physics (or maybe mathematics?) who explained to us the terms "convex" and "concave". Those are two kinds of curved surfaces, the latter one being curved towards inside, therefore able to "hold coffee". In other words, to behave like the vessels usually do.

From the very beginning, our mankind was facing the problem how to handle the second, liquid form of matter. Disregarding the gaseous one, which they hardly knew it existed, they all appreciated that when it comes to solid matter one can take a firm grab of it. But liquid? Try to hold it in your hand - it always finds the way out. But our forefathers were also smart enough to notice that mother nature provided them with already made, ready to use

vessels like a shell of coconut, dried shells of some vegetables, even empty seashells. And that's how our vessels came to life.

Later they started to manufacture them as well: from wood, baked clay, even glass. The oldest archeological finds of glass are almost all vessels: bottles, jars, bowls. There was also something magical in them, something inviting people to decorate them. And they still do, be it vases, glasses, goblets, tankards, cups and what not. There is quite a number of artists, who devoted their time and talents to it. Like Mr. Jaroslav Matous whose artifacts has seen many exhibitions, in places like Germany, Japan, Spain and yes, EXPO, too. True, he also does the beautiful glass windows and of course *convex* objects as well, but his vessels enchanted me most. The vessels with striking colors, forms and shapes, the objects of glass, cut or molded, painted, dressed and combined, all of them beautiful their own way.

Yes, there is something sacred in vessels - be it old amphoras, urns or even the Holy Grail. Bot also something inviting and tempting: that's why many of them are intended for decoration only, just to become even more mysterious. They posses the qualities of concavity we all cherish: the beauty, gentleness and femininity.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/2000_02/Ramec.html

THE ARTIST OF MANY TALENTS

(The exhibition of Blanka Matragi - Kyselova)



I have to admit I am hopelessly masculine type: not that I am some sort of macho-man, but when it comes to things feminine I am not feeling so confident. We men simple have different opinions, different tastes. I am not complaining, on the contrary, I believe that it is all in order. Even our Creator realized it when he noticed how many drawbacks Adam really had and the only way he could repair His reputation was to create Eve. Then, in order to make it acceptable to us, vain men, he invented the story about Adam's rib and what not. It took men several millennia to figure out how it really was. Many of us still don't know it and those who know have, in spite of it - or rather *because* of it - a certain fear of women, namely of women of many talents, like for instance the artist *Blanka Matragi - Kyselova*.

When I sat down at my keyboard to write this essay, I felt ill at ease: what should I write about first? About her design talents, about her models, her studies of art and glass-art in Bohemia? Or maybe about the fact she is the *academic painter* (i.e. a special academic title)? And why, with all my modesty, particularly me ? Then I remembered I was writing an essay, the form of writing where all things are permitted (at least in my essays), even some permissiveness itself. Take for instance my knowledge of ladies fashions: true, I attended several fashion shows - only in the audience, mind you - but every time I did, I caught myself watching the girls rather than the dresses they were wearing.

Of course it didn't improve with age, my age that is. It is a certain comfort that I am not alone in this. Once on the show by Sheridan College in Oakville their student models presented the new line of dresses with see-through tops. When they unexpectedly appeared on the stage, the professors of musical faculty who played in Dixieland band, lost not only the rhythm but the melody as well. Especially their saxophone player who still managed in the sudden silence something which reminded me the last song of a solitary swan.

Luckily for me I have my wife At'a who understands those things, partly because she is a woman, partly because she graduated - from the same college - in Fashion Arts. We both have a different taste, almost diametrically opposite. Sometimes I even joke that her taste is worse than mine, considering that I chose her while she only settled for me. In other words, I don't usually like what she likes and vice versa (maybe except for my person, I also like myself very much).

As far as the fashion is concerned, At'a is the only *arbiter elegantiarum* in our family. So when I

looked at the art of Blanka Matragi, I liked it immediately, but I couldn't take my word for it. So I carefully and with feigned indifference showed At'a the photographs of the models from *Blanka Haute Couture*. To my amazement At'a was more than enthusiastic. You can imagine my surprise: during our long marriage, we agreed only three times about anything and if we ever agree, it surely must be beautiful, believe me. True, I could have talked here about how she liked the design and individual robes - especially those with laces - and many other things I am no authority at, but I think that I have provided the *real* proof here already.

As I mentioned, Blanka Matragi is a woman of many talents: next to charming designs and photographs of her models, the exhibition also shows her *Blanka Crystal Line*, the collection of blown and hand-made glass for the glass-works in Kamenicky Senov. The collection is attractive not only because of the choice of colors, but also thanks to beautiful forms, from simpler shapes to really sophisticated goblets, carafes and decanters. The artist is just returning back to something she never ceased to love: the creations made of glass. And I should add from "Czech glass", but there is no need, because the collection of Blanka Matragi-Kyselova already joined the world-known tradition of Czech glass-makers.

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/2000_03/Ramec.html

THE ESCAPE FROM THE THIRD DIMENSION

(The exhibition of Pavel Trnka)



Our world is undisputedly three-dimensional, at least that's what we learned at school. Still, it is only a fiction: we invented those three dimensions for our convenience only. We could have taken another number, say five and we wouldn't need to measure only distances, but the angles as well. It's simply because we live in squared world and the cube or prism are the main building blocks of our *earth-space*. But how many dimensions does the sphere have? Well, only one if you ask me. And when we leave our globe, even that one dimension is becoming smaller and smaller, until it disappears and we are left with one dimension only: the time. And even the time is running sometimes faster, sometimes slower over there. . .

Our world is of course not only three-dimensional, it is also very limited. Not only by those three dimensions, but

mostly by them. And we are like that *mime* who is searching for escape from behind the fictitious glass barrier and with his spread fingers he is feeling that non-existent surface. Or like my neighbor's dog who has a special collar around his neck and gets electric shocks whenever he is approaching the wire which is buried around his master's property. At first it looks like a miracle, but it is only electronics which is controlling the dog remotely. Him, the slave who knows how to wear his collar.

Sometime I imagine that behind our three-dimensional world, that artificial barrier, lays the great cosmos of art, the only space where our mind can start running in the right direction. In any direction. And it is interesting that for that start we often need a piece of glass, be it the one in telescope, microscope or a glassy ball of an old fortune-teller. Or take the works of glass by *Pavel Trnka*, the glass-master, painter and sculptor, the works which are admired all over our, still three-dimensional, world. When I look them over I cannot help thinking that they have something which reminds me that escape from the third dimension: be it the color which penetrates through by sheer diffusion, or the inner tension which eventually results in shell-shaped surface of the crack, or even the vessel which looks like somebody inside tried to "cut" his way out. Yes, even the light which passes through prism suddenly shows its *true* colors, the rainbow arc at the end of which we can find - according to some Irish fairy-tale - the hidden treasure, the proverbial pot of gold.

Yes, the glass, the frozen liquid, that "solidus liquidus", at first glance immobile, but inside boiling with something which is invisible, but still ethereally ever-present. The piece of glassy meteorite which travelled here from God-knows-where. And we are watching with amazement that

messenger from distant worlds, the messenger of the beauty transparent and therefore dimensionless. Like a magic crystal, the key, which opens the door leading from our three-dimensional world to the other space, which has *one* dimension only: the art..

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/2000_04/Ramec.html

THE JOURNEY INWARDS

(*The exhibition of Ivan Mareš*)



I guess I will never forget the impression the Niagara Falls made on my father, when I finally took him there during his last trip in Canada. He used to be a member of western-lovers' movement, those who called themselves "tramps" and every weekend disappeared in the countryside to live their wild adventures. He had a cabin in the settlement called "*The Crawfish Valley*" and "Niagara" was his distant a therefore immortal love - as it was in the famous song of the same name.

As he was standing there, his eyes came alive with old memories and I had to envy him. I have lived in Canada and States, worked in London and Tokyo, but I felt he was the great traveller who lived through many adventures, all of them greater than I ever had. He didn't ride on *Canadian Pacific*, just on some old train to *Sazava valley*, he never fished for salmon, only for river trout, and he didn't conquer the wild rapids of Orinoco, but *Svatojanské proudy* instead. You see, it really does not matter *where* do you live your adventure, but how much it comes from your heart. It is not given by number of miles you traveled nor how many borders you crossed. By some magic, the adventure is actually hidden in our souls and had to be discovered - it is not a journey *out*, but rather a trip *inwards*.

The same thing apparently applies to art: you have to know how to look under its surface and peel its secrets off, one layer after another. And deeper you go, the more layers are there. It can be best seen on art objects made of glass: they are transparent and still, or maybe because of that, so mysterious. It looks as they are hiding inside some other space, made invisible by its transparency. Such are also the objects created by Ivan Mareš. Not only because of modern techniques he is using - we know they are quite complex and difficult as well - no, it is mainly because of the subjects he chooses, the style of shapes and the harmony of colors. And much more than that, as it was already proven by his success abroad.

I was especially attracted by his "Nautilus". Very interesting creature indeed: the sea mollusk, something between a snail and an octopus, the only one surviving animal of his kind, 450 million years of surviving plus-minus a million or so. It lives rather peacefully in its shell and floats in the water like nothing else matters, once a while spreading its tentacles and catching a shrimp. Yet it is

a mystery of its own: it moves with the help of rather modern technique: by expulsing a jet of water, similarly to the principle of rocket. And what's more: his shell contains several compartments, where it can adjust the volume of water or air, so it can sink and surface same way the modern submarine does. No wonder that great Jules Verne gave his captain Nemo's ship the name *Nautilus*.

But that is not a reason why I like the Nautilus by Ivan Mareš that much; in spite of the fact that I am rather fascinated by *any* creature of sea. I was mostly attracted by the delicate way the artist kept the natural beauty of nautilus and added still another, the truly artistic one. And there's exactly where the imagination and deeper comprehension starts, where the real art begins. The process which I sometimes feel is never ending since it is the process of self-discovery as well. The discovery of the Doppelganger inside us, the one we can seldom see or hear.

The scientists also admit that while the nautilus lives on this Earth - pardon me, I meant "in our seas" - for so long, we still know very little about it. They did not explain why it is so, but it's not so difficult to guess: we also know so little about ourselves . . .

See the pictures at: http://www.gallery.cz/gallery/en/Vystava/2000_05/Ramec.html

Jan B.Hurych



was born before WWII in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he mostly grew up, well, not too much, only five feet and seven inches. During his younger years, he travelled extensively, mostly by tram No.14, as a student of Prague Technical University. After graduation, he took some job, but soon he returned to University as an Assistant, later Assistant Lecturer. After nine years and one invasion (in 1969), he took his last tram, this time to Ruzyne Airport, where his traces disappeared.

They appeared again in England, where he took an adventurous job of cleaning windows in high-rise buildings. It was during this time he discovered a very efficient method how to wash up to hundred windows a day - this idea was later shamelessly copied as Windows 95. His target was however Canada and again, his footprints disappeared at the

airport, called Heathrow.

In the meantime, his "North-West passage" continued as he reappeared in Montreal, Canada. It almost looked like he would settle down: he got job with U.S. computer company, got married and bought the house. Well, you can't get more settled than that and Jan started to count the years remaining to his retirement. After nine years and one separatist election, he got tired of Quebec as well and performed another disappearing act at Dorval Airport.

He landed in Toronto, where he spent ten productive years, mostly with design of power plants and the rest with CSA (Canadian Standard Association), certifying U.S. and Japanese computers, for which he had to travel there - well, most of the time. Surprisingly enough, he got tired of flying as well and moved North of Toronto, to the beautiful shores of Lake Huron, where he worked at Bruce nuclear plant.

He then learned they were looking for design engineers in Saskatchewan and his wanderlust appeared again. True, it was 3000 km away, but it was another North-West passage and he could not say "no". He seated his wife Vlasta behind the steering wheel of their covered wagon Firenza and their dog Tara laid down comfortably on the rear seat. After full 4 days of driving, they finally got there. And they were never sorry, which is rather odd, considering that winter temperatures there were close to minus forty degrees Fahrenheit. After three years, Vlasta returned back to guard their house at Huron against cyclones and Jan stayed another year to finish the contract.

Finally he returned back to Ontario and after another year, he decided to retire with good intention to age gracefully. Instead, he started subsequently four Internet magazines (Hurontaria, Priloznik,

Enigma and Sfinga, covering now 12 years) and devoted most of his time to writing. He is the webmaster of three additional webpages and also writes to different magazines, for instance for artistic gallery in Prague (ArtForum). Apparently, that was still not enough and so he created the library of his electronic books KNIHY OFF-LINE (i.e. Books off-line), both in Czech and English (this book being one of them). He also designs electronic illustrations for his webzines and books.

Jan still travels, but this time not on company time or money :-). He is sometimes considered to be of a Scottish descent, namely when he is tipping in restaurants. He has no account in Switzerland, be it secret or open kind, but he also confessed his sincere regrets he does not. He unselfishly shares his rich travel experiences with his friends, mostly at the local pub.
