

Joža Uprka

Mucha archive

No. 364: Alphonse Mucha, Memoirs

Joins Munich academy in October 1885 - The Club of Czech artists "Škréta" meets every Saturday at Karlsstrasse (**Joža Uprka**, Luděk Marold, chairman Kamil Stuchlík, Jan Vilímek, Vácha, Viktor Mašek, Dítě, Augustin Němejc, Beneš, Hofrichter, Ptáček, Vochoč, Kubíček and others). First 30 Czech members, later other Slavs.

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"It was after holidays at the beginning of October of the year 1885 when like so many others I, young adept of art, came to fill myself with light in the then Mecca of all arts, at the Munich academy.

Soon I have noticed I wasn't the only Czech there. As soon as the second day I discovered there were more of them and that they meet every Saturday in the club's room somewhere at Karlsstrasse. Saturday was in two days time and I went to find the building. Shyly I opened the door at half past seven. I was greeted by hot air rich with tobacco smoke and my ears went deaf by powerful singing of current national anthem "Where Is My Country". **Jožka Úprka** and Sochán rushed to greet me. I have met them and made my acquaintance with them by chance the previous day. He introduced me and the jolly spirit continued.

And I was given a chair and was sitting with others behind long table. **Jožka** on one side of me, Marold on the other one. Next to him was sitting Stuchlík who was chairman then. It was here during this jolly festive occasion under a large picture of Prague painted also by one of them, where I met Luděk Marold for the first time.

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Student's camaraderie developed into a true friendship and the memory of it continues still. For two years we lived in Munich the shared life of the whole Czech artistic colony. Life governed by the shared laws and shared order.

In the morning at 8 o'clock into the academy. At the midday at 12 o'clock Ramberger Hof to lunch together. After that Cafe Union to a game of chess. From 2 o'clock till 5 academy, again. Only after that we parted to our homes. But not for long because by 7 we were at Ramberger for dinner together.

When circumstances permitted the whole colony was going into a "cellar" for beer where there was more talking than drinking. That exhausted the program of the day. Only to start the whole thing again the following day.

The whole life of all of us was spent between academy and "Škréta" club. Even outside the school were all members of the club together. If somebody was missing he had to be ill. Our Czech colony at the Munich academy was quite numerous back then. There were thirty of us and later when our numbers grew by arrival of several Russians, Poles, Serbs and Bulgarians life of the club developed and Slav language sounded in almost all dialects.

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History of individuals was history of the "Škréta" Club in a way that we were all breathing unanimously the spirit of good friendship and nobody was separating, nobody was looking for a closer union outside the shared life. Our life went forward for two years in the same stream, under the same Sun, in the same cold.

For holidays we went to our homelands. This last year was the last year of Škréta's greatness, the last year of its national importance. And the following year has found its numbers depleted and it was getting smaller until it disappeared in a short time.

No. 373: Alphonse Mucha – Memoirs:

Munich (p. 111). "Here the flame of art with its aesthetic and philosophic laws was shining. Then the only flame of creative force, the only correct interpreter of laws governing without grumbling the taste, the style, the technique of pictorial art. Here I sit by the spring and pump and pump!" (p. 114). The club of Czech artists gathers once a week publishing weakly the Paleta journal, giving lectures "and I immediately founded singing group" (p. 115). Joža Uprka and the Russian Widoff come to see him on evenings and they paint together topics they choose. The results often end up in The Paleta journal (p. 116):

"I also arranged a working circle. This circle had only three students I have met during my first visit. There was old friend **Joža Uprka**, then Russian Widoff and myself. We met at my flat on Amalienstrasse in the evening after dinner. I prepared tea and bread and we composed the tasks we have chosen ourselves. These were often used in The Paleta journal."

He is elected chairman of the Škréta Club and enlarges the number of members from 26 to over 60 by inviting all Slavs. Picture of Karel Škréta by Luděk Marold hangs above the club's table. "I have painted St John for the festival of St. John Nepomuk." There were Ludvík Marold, Hansi Vilímek, Velc, Němejc, Kubíček, Zamrazil, Slavíček, Luňáček, Vácha, Vidoff, Alexomatti, there (p. 117).

[The handwritten Paleta journal is kept at the National Gallery in Prague]

No. 372.3: Alphonse Mucha, Memoirs - Rodin visiting Moravian Slovakia 1902

Our artist's club, "Manes", built a very nice exhibition pavilion at the foot of Letná in Prague and they decided to exhibit some works of Maître August Rodin. No doubt it was because of his beloved pupil Mařatka that the idea came to fruition.

It was right after the turmoil of the World Exhibition in Paris and it didn't matter if there would be yet one more noisy event. Mons. Rodin was well loved and respected in Prague and that helped to turn the feelings of the audience, overnight, into the enthusiasm that Rodin's work was worthy of.

The day was chosen and preparations finished. I still lived in Paris then and agreed with my friend Mařatka to accompany Rodin on train from Paris to Prague, Brno, Hodonín and Velká where **Jožka Uprka** was inviting several dozens of boys and girls into his garden. And he slaughtered a pig. (p. 1).

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The following morning we visited our fellow artists in Hodonín, saw their exhibition and we had a formal lunch. Our stay in Moravian Slovakia already looked like a successful and cordial feast. The Sun was shining and sky was turquoise blue without a single cloud. The true pictorial light for paintings of Moravian Slovakia. We managed to eat our lunch in a hurry and off we went to the train.

A splendid gathering was awaiting us at the village green. Boys were in their festive costumes, their horses covered by ribbons. There were about thirty of them and their flags were improvised (patterned red head scarves tied to the poles). They were waiting for us to accompany us to Velká village where Jožka's house was.

We went through several villages and in each, a dozen boys on horseback, joined us.

Jožka welcomed us and took us straight into the garden where we lay under the fruit trees. After a moment the local music band appeared behind the bushes to welcome us. Drinks were passed around. I can see the whole scene which moved us all by its beauty. Girls in colourful headscarves and white sleeves completed the impression and people held their breath so as not to spoil the moment. Rodin, moved to tears by the unspoilt beauty of it all, shook my hand and admitted he never experienced anything like it and would love to stay for ever.

And we were eating and drinking toasts and hugging one another and I have to admit I had not expected so much unspoilt beauty.

And now, boys, dance! and bring a barrel of wine - both white and red and one of beer and some graceful music - just like in gardens of Elysée and we will wish the Sun to never set.

But merciless time went forward. But girls continued serving us bringing more wine and it almost looked as if Sun stopped above Gabaon while we were lying in the ground motionless and sitting around the tables. It got dark.

But the boys were dancing as if at Olympus, holding the girls around the waist. But we had to think about leaving. Slowly groups were gathering, horses became restless and the band stood in the front but they had great difficulties to get our Rodin from his armchair and take the place of honour in the first carriage. I was ordered to sit next to him. And now, "Thank you!" and "God be with you, **Jožka!**" And shouting "Nazdar!" and "Goodbye!" Rodin heard - but probably didn't understand. What he did understand was the cordiality of everyone present.

And we didn't see or hear anything until we stopped in front of a big gate. Our place to spend the night. A very wealthy leader of the factory asks those of us in the first carriage to allow him to offer us his hospitality.

We got out and entered a large courtyard. The gate was shut. It is dark only the outside lights are shining carried by girls singing. After a while even that went silent and we were alone. Our host, no doubt an important member of the community was full of kindness and good will.

He asked us to follow him into a chosen corner where we can surely have a good rest. Despite of our treats - or because of them - we were both really tired and blessed the good will and understanding of our host.

And here is the hall, a door, another door and a dark room. Just the place to fall asleep! Click, click - two strong bulbs and we can see a room richly furnished. Our willing host steps in, moves aside tulle netting - and there are shining white sheets. We look around us, curious how the other one will fare. I thank the host warmly for his troubles and add worried "We will sleep like in paradise!" Yes, but I keep looking around "where will you put me?" And the host opened his arms and points towards the bed - "Why, here - do not worry, it is large enough."

And I saw that while Rodin didn't understand Czech he did understand the situation. But we saved the day! I discovered a nice large sofa in the adjacent room and asked Mr Host to find something to put under my head and some covers. After some searching it was found and I was lying down.

Next to me, who was happily on the sofa (a little bit short but who cares) our host was still standing shaking his head and when he looked at Rodin, he shook his head again that we are not both able to appreciate such expensive comfort.

And Rodin thanked him claiming it was like sleeping at home! And "goodnights" and we slept.

We were woken up by a rooster from the yard - his victorious fanfare defeated the darkness - and shortly a bell was summoning us for breakfast. Everything around us was a swimming vision.

After breakfast we slowly went on and travelled back to Paris via Brno and Prague.

Rodin took with him unforgettable memories and was thanking us the organizers for them and even the whole Classical (his words), yes Classical nation from the bottom of his heart. Long live Prague - and farewell. (p. 9-14).

No. 1196: Maruška Mucha, How Uprka Lost His Luggage, The Národní Politika 25 January 1940

"At the end of February 1912 we travelled via Venice to Dubrovnik where my husband in peace and quiet wanted to make sketches of the first pictures of his great epic which has been emerging in his mind for long time."

In Venice they met painter **Joža Uprka** with whom Mucha reminiscences about the student years in Munich. Mucha rents a small villa at Lapad. "Mucha placed his easel and paints in a small garden in front of the house."

No. 94: Painter **Joža Uprka** from Hroznová Lhota to Alphonse Mucha in Dubrovnik on 6 March 1912
paper with woodcut selfportrait

No.95: Painter **Joža Uprka** from Hroznová Lhota on 24 September 1919 to Maruška Mucha in Prague, Thunovská 25
Invites Alphonse and Mr. Crane to come, he needs to sell pictures

Renting a villa in Dalmatia; invitation to the general assembly in Brno
No. 1234.44: The Venkov 7th June 1928

Jubilee exhibition of members of the Club of Moravian Visual Artists in Hodonín has been opened there in their club house recently. There are works of Alphonse Mucha, J. Obrovský, A. Kalvoda, Lasák, Ondrůšek, Fialka, **Franta Uprka** and many other Moravian painters and sculptors.