

The Story in Paintings

By carefully choosing the paintings which would be the legacy to his birth place, Mića Popović introduced the most intimate part of himself as an artist and made a detailed retrospective of his entire artistic work and creativity. If we look at it closely, we will realise that we can also observe the biographical aspect through these chosen works of art.

Chronologically, the first painting is Great-great-grandfather's house in Loznica painted in 1936. It does not belong to the professional period (he made it when he was thirteen) and it is small in size, however, it is big for what it meant to Mića and for what we can conclude about his childhood and the bond between him and his hometown. Then there is Self-portrait painted in 1947, to which Mića was emotionally attached. There is also Turkey where he shows his first steps in experimenting. The family paintings, portraits of his mother and father painted in 1948, and also the composition Citizens from 1949, were created in the period of the social realism and here Mića denies such a tendency in art and returns to the past drawing inspiration from the art of the period between wars, poetic intimacy and bourgeois realism. Peasant Trunk (1952) belongs to the cycle The Village of Nepričava and here he returns to the tradition, our rich folklore and medieval period.

On the crossing between the sixth and seventh decade, there is Boat (1960) which speaks in favour of the fact that Mića was turning towards some new ways which would take him towards Informalism. During that ten year period, Mića gave us A Painting made in 1963. It is a black and heavy canvas which is an embodiment of matter as it is, densely stacked on the canvas. It is a complete denial and murder of a painting, in the classical sense of the word. With one painting he manages to show us his long-term struggle for the truth in visual arts, his strong artistic attitude and undeniable sincerity towards himself. With that sincerity and the unity with his own being, he achieves to make expressive works of art in which his individuality reaches the universal. Few artists are able to bring that personal feeling to the final stage in creativity, not minding the social, political and all other circumstances. There is a danger that the content of the feelings becomes objectified into unsuitable form, which can eventually bring to bad art. Mića managed to bring his truths to the end; he had a skill to show it in the first person, not as if it was mirrored. He succeeded in reconciling matter and form. Out of canvases which were burnt, scorched, grey, black, resinlike and scattered with ashes, new paintings rose like Phoenix, full of colours, form and idea – SCENES

In paintings like Gvozden's Graph (1970) to A Small Gastarbeiter (1979), he again shows his determination to tell the truth, to give both aesthetics and ethics, he returns to the figure of man, but also to still life. He reveals himself in his paintings, even when they are not self-portraits. I fell (in the Downtown – Albany, New York) painted in 1981 and the self-portrait from the back tell us a lot more than a travelogue or a biography. However, above all it asks a question if he is contemplative, if he is with his head down in front of a problem, or in front of a crossroad or new inspiration.

With the painting *My Mother* (1982), he gives us a portrait of his mother in the most realistic and, at the same time, most expressive way. He gives us a part of every one of us, our mother, ourselves. In *Rembrandt's Honour*, one of the variants he painted between 1983 and 1987, is also one of the combinations of a self-portrait and that exact moment in society. He looks at us without fear, he is not having second thoughts and he confirms his absolute presence in the idea he follows. His maturity in visual arts is shown with harmony, colouring, light, and fine contrasts in *Great Still Life* painted in 1989. Although not the last one chronologically, the painting *My Father in Loznica* in 1923 (1988) comes as the last one in this story in paintings. As a time machine, it takes us to the year of Mića's birth; it takes us to Loznica, to Jovan Cvijić Street and almost all the way to the Katić House, to tell us that maybe nothing is an accident, not even taking a photo of his father back in 1923.

As some kind of a tree of life, there are the trunk and main branches which are a framework of the whole story in paintings, but there are also other, but not less important, twigs. Some of them are drawings and graphics – from thousands of notes and sketches for paintings and films, thoughtfully elaborated and inspired by the seen and read. We are in them: people, small and big, lonely or surrounded by friends, serious and rough men or sensual and tender women. He told us everything and he was quiet about nothing. And even if he was, he wrote about that in his journals, books, and letters. Bits and pieces, personal and ordinary, but none the less important, are rested in showcases to preserve them from oblivion. They tell their stories, some of them are Mića's and some are not.

The same way as she followed him through life, Vera Božičković Popović did it again by giving us her paintings. Since her first days as a student, through all the swirling years of working together and beautiful years of life, they were together always and in everything. The proofs for this are her paintings *Flow and Clash* (1964), *Pit* (1968), *The Portrait of Mića Popović* (1974), and *Initial and Abstraction* (1977). These are the representative paintings of Vera's mature phase of Informalism, when she is fully consistent in actualizing her ideas onto the canvas. The ideas on these paintings are a true expression of her inner being and her thoughts. She does not deny colour any more, as she did on her first paintings of Informalism period, but she uses it to enhance the experienced and by doing that she emphasizes the matter even more, which is the starting point of Informalism. Some of these paintings, such as *Pit*, are like parts of nature not yet touched by a human hand. They are in all their beauty and man has not got to it to beautify, decorate, or tame it.

With their gift, Vera and Mića belong to each other completely, they belong to us, and they belong to eternity. They stand side by side, supporting each other, understanding each other, but both with their own expression, their own truth, which is a real and special kind of beauty. Mića indirectly also brought some of his friends by giving us monographs and books that other artists, art historians and writers wrote about him.

After his death, the Gallery was enriched with the easel, palette and a work coat Mića used in his studio.

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