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Růžena Zátková and her sister Sláva

Two female Bohemian artists in the international circles of Munich at the beginning of the 20th-century

Růžena Zátková (1885-1923) was a Bohemian artist, considered futurist, who is still little studied and almost unknown beyond Futurism studies. The recent publication *Růžena Zátková. Un'artista dimenticata* by Marina Giorgini¹ seeks to pull this special woman from the oblivion of time and to determine whether she can be considered as a futurist artist in all intents and purposes, or whether she should be considered, on grounds of her style and artistic sensibility, more akin to other avant-gardes, especially the Russian. Her extraordinary history, in particular the relationships that she laced with some famous people of her time – Ivan Meštrović, Igoř Stravinskij or Natal'ja Gončarova, to name just a few – formed Zátková's personality in an original and absolutely fascinating way.

Zátková was born in Březí near České Budějovice into a prestigious family of cultural Bohemian aristocracy. Her father Vlastimil Zátka was a descendent of an eminent family of entrepreneurs from České Budějovice, her mother Karolina was the niece of Karel Havlíček Borovský, a famous writer, poet, critic, politician, journalist and publisher and her uncle, August Zátka, was a notable figure in his native city where a statue of him is placed even now in the Town Hall courtyard.

In 1901 the whole Zátka family moved to Prague; two years later Růžena and her sister Sláva started to attend the private school of painting opened by Vladimír Županský and Antonín Slavíček, a Czech Impressionist painter. In autumn 1906 Sláva left Prague for Munich following the suggestion of the painter František Bohumil Doubek, who, originally from České Budějovice, moved in 1885 to Munich, where he received his artistic education from Alexander von Liezen-Mayer and then stayed there for more than three decades. When Sláva in January 1908 returned to Munich after a family visit, Růžena accompanied her to the Bavarian capital.

¹ Giorgini, Marina, *Růžena Zátková. Un'artista dimenticata*, Brussels, Peter Lang 2019.

The present project aims to investigate the two Zátková sisters' period in Munich by embedding their sojourn within a wider historical and socio-political context, which also takes into consideration the specific artistic situation in Munich, especially for women artists, after the turn of the century.

STATUS OF RESEARCH

The basic biographic and historical background of the project is given by the essential exhibition catalogue *Růžena příběh maličky růženy zátkové / Story of the painter Růžena Zátková* published in 2011 by Alena Pomajzlová.² Here the author presented for the first time fundamental information arising from documents such as Sláva's diary or the letters between the Zátka family members, preserved in private collections or in the Archives of the National Museum in Prague.

From these documents we know that Sláva, once in Munich, began to study under a friend and colleague of Doubek, Max Feldbauer, a founding member of the Munich artist group *Die Scholle* (founded in 1898) and the *Münchener Neue Secession* (founded in 1913), who from 1901 to 1915 gave classes at the *Damen-Akademie* of the *Künstlerinnen-Verein München* (Ladies' Academy of the League of Women Artists in Munich), active in Munich since 1884.³

When in January 1908 Sláva and Růžena left Prague for the Bavarian capital, Sláva continued her studies with Feldbauer and, together with her sister, attended an evening painting course in the private school of Moritz Heymann, a Jewish painter and graphic artist, who had been the director of the lithographic class at the *Damen-Akademie* from 1903 to 1906. Růžena started studying with Angelo Jank, a colleague of Feldbauer, who in his painting had specialized on animal scenes, mostly with horses and riders. Like Feldbauer, Jank was also an illustrator, working for the magazine *Jugend*, a printmaker, a member of the *Münchner Secession*, and, from 1899 to 1907, a teacher at the *Damen-Akademie*. According to the sources, Růžena took also illustration classes with the painter Ferdinand Götz (1874-1941).

A private episode that occurred a few months after her arrival in Munich, shows the strong impact of the socio-political historic situation on the personal biography of Růžena: in spring she became engaged with the Prussian Lieutenant Baron Karl

² Pomajzlová, Alena (ed.), *Růžena – Story of the painter Růžena Zátková*, Exhibition Catalogue, Prague, April 7– July 31, 2011, Prague, Arbor vitae societas and Porte 2011.

³ The principal aim of the *Künstlerinnen-Verein* and its *Damen-Akademie* was to give women artists, who at that time were not allowed to attend the State Academies of Fine Arts, the possibility to work and develop their talents in a creative, high-levelled academic atmosphere. For further information on the *Künstlerinnen-Verein München* and its *Damen-Akademie* see Desevve Yvette, *Der Künstlerinnen-Verein München e.V. und seine Damen-Akademie. Eine Studie zur Ausbildungssituation von Künstlerinnen im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, München, Herbert Utz Verlag 2005.

Christian von Loesch. Their announcement was even reported in the newspaper *Sport im Bild* with the couple's portrait photographs. In a letter to her uncle, who was her legal guardian after the death of her father Vlastimil in 1907, we learn about Růžena's wish to get married: «Dear Uncle! [...] I have, in recent days and in the presence of my mother, become engaged with one Karl Christian von Loesch here [...]. My mother was initially very reluctant, given our different nationalities, but recognising his kind and charming personality, she has acknowledged that I could hardly find a better man, and has agreed. We have set our wedding for the beginning of June [...] I appeal to you with the request to kindly assist me in this matter [...]»⁴. August Zátka's reaction was furious. He wrote to von Loesch: «The news of your engagement with my niece has grieved me immensely. I had not expected from Růžena who comes from the Havlíček and Zátka families, to give up on her nationality so easily. As her legal guardian, I cannot give my permission for this union in view of the battles that the Czech nation is leading against the German, nonetheless, I do not wish to bear the responsibility for its rejection. [...] I allow myself to request from you to test the perseverance of Růžena's romantic feelings by postponing your wedding [...]»⁵. Actually, the engagement was not only a family affair, but developed into a socio-political scandal with far-reaching consequences because of the tense relationships existing between the Czechs and the Germans at the time. «All the gossip that is spreading around Prague» wrote Karolína Havlíček Zátková perturbed in a letter to her daughter Sláva «The Czechs have been boycotting our factory because of Růžena's marriage and uncle August is working on persuading Růžena to sell [her] factory shares»⁶. In the end, the engagement was cancelled and Růžena turned back home, to Prague.

Apart from this sentimental anecdote we don't know very much about Růžena's and Sláva's stay in Munich. Information is still scarce and therefore, at the moment, it is impossible to say which social and artistic circles they frequented or how the teaching of Feldbauer, Jank and Heymann influenced their future artistic careers.⁷ A first consultation of the member-list of the *Damen-Akademie* of the *Künstlerinnen-Verein* in Munich as well as a first investigation into the artistic circle around Franz Marc, Marie Schnür (Marc's first wife and teacher at the *Damen-Akademie*), and Marc's second wife Maria Franck, who, between 1902 and 1907 attended classes by Feldbauer and Jank at the *Damen-Akademie*, showed no immediate results. Never-

⁴ Růžena Zátková, letter to August Zátka, August 23, 1908, Archive of the National Museum in Prague, in: Pomajzlová, *Růžena – Story of the painter Růžena Zátková*, p. 381, n. 491.

⁵ August Zátka, letter to Karl Christian von Loesch, Family archive of Dr. August Zátka, Basel, in: Pomajzlová, *Růžena – Story of the painter Růžena Zátková*, p. 370.

⁶ From the diary of Sláva Zátková, private collection, in: Pomajzlová, *Růžena – Story of the painter Růžena Zátková*, p. 370.

⁷ The following years are characterized by a fundamental separation of the sisters' artistic path: Růžena moves to Rome and becomes an unconventional artist attracted by abstract and avant-garde art, Sláva goes to Paris and continues her career as a traditional and figurative painter.

theless, we think it should be possible to reconstruct the Munich environment at that time in a wider array, focusing on the Bohemian artistic circles that existed in Munich as well as on the specific possibilities offered by the classes of the *Damen-Akademie* of the *Künstlerinnen-Verein* or by private schools such as that of Moritz Heymann.

At the end of the 19th century Munich lived a moment of glory. The use of electricity in the streets and in houses had just been launched, large public works such as streets, theaters and museums had been set up and new collective areas had been created for the urban multitude. The German city was shaping up to be an international metropolis where artists from all over Europe gathered, attracted by the fervent intellectual and artistic life. In January 1909, only a few months after Ružena's return to Prague in autumn 1908, the *Neue Künstler-Vereinigung München* (New artists' Association) was founded and in 1912 *Der Blaue Reiter*. These artists had «behind them a formation linked to Symbolism and French Fauves, towards whom the Munich environment, due to its cultural liveliness and geographic position, [had] a greater opening than other German towns; but the main feature of the group [was] the heterogeneity of the provenance, both for their native countries and for cultural connections and interests.»⁸

From that perspective, it would be desirable to learn more about Ružena and Sláva Zátková and their reception of and contribution to this multiethnic pastiche.

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⁸ Nigro Covre, Jolanda, *Arte contemporanea: le avanguardie storiche*, Roma, Carocci 2008, pp. 66-67.