

## Esej

VLAHO BUKOVAC

Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti

### Razmišljanja o slikarstvu

## Essay

VLAHO BUKOVAC

The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

### Thoughts on Painting

Vlaho Bukovac cijenjani je hrvatski slikar, počasni je član Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, a njegov opus ostvaren u Zagrebu, Pragu, Parizu i Londonu pripada temeljnim europskim impresionističkim djelima nastalih početkom dvadesetog stoljeća. Svoja razmišljanja o suštini slikarstva objavio je u autobiografskoj knjizi *Moj život*, objavljene u Zagrebu, 1918. godine. Na osnovu opisa svojih razmišljanja pri koncipiranju slike *Gundulićev san* (na svečanoj zavjesi Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta u Zagrebu) i portreta suvremenika dovodi do zaključka da je nacrt temelj kiparskog i slikarskog umijeća.

#### *Ključne riječi:*

Vlaho Bukovac; slikar; autobiografija; *Gundulićev san*

Vlaho Bukovac is a highly regarded Croatian painter. He was an honourable member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and his works created in Zagreb, Prague, Paris, and London are among the foundational European impressionist works of the early 20th century. He published his thoughts on the essence of painting in his autobiography *My Life (Moj život)*, published in Zagreb in 1918. On the basis of his descriptions of his thoughts on his conception of the painting *Gundulić's Dream* (on the gala curtain of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb) and portraits of his contemporaries, he concludes that the sketch is the foundation of both sculpture and painting.

#### *Key words:*

Vlaho Bukovac; painter; autobiography; *Gundulić's Dream*

Prvoga posjetih Račkoga. On nas je vrlo srdačno primio. Dugo smo raspravljali o narodnim motivima i dogovarali se glede sujeta slike, koju mi je Strossmayer naručio. Mene sve to nije zadovoljilo, a onda će Rački, da me na Gundulića sjeti i ne čekajući mog odgovora, odmah se lati "Osmana", i poče da mi po malo čita, a kad je došao do stiha

"O djevice čiste i blage,  
Ke vrh gore slavne i svete,  
Slatkom riječi pjesmi drage,  
Svim pjevačim naričete.  
Narecite sad i meni,  
Kako istočnom Caru mladu,  
Nesmiljeni vitezovi  
Smrt daše u svom Carigradu"

Tu sam Račkoga zaustavio i rekao mu, da mi je slika gotova u pameti. Odmah učinih prvu skicu; što se kaže udarih mu u pravu biljegu. Bijaše zadovoljan i tako smo se lako i bez Strossmayerove naročito potvrde o svem ostalom dogovorili.

U Zagrebu sam izložio i sliku biskupa Strossmayera, izradjenu u Djakovu. Svi su pohvalili moje djelo. – Na to mi je barun Ljudevit Vraniczany naručio portrait svog pokojnog oca, koga sam u Parizu kasnije po fotografiji dovršio. Uz to mi se neprestano po glavi motala slika „Gundulićev san“. Težak bijaše predmet, ali za to bogat i dostojan velikog majstora, u čudu se pitam, kako bi današnji „kubisti“ vidno prikazali sliku izraženu tim neumrlim stihovima! Meni je ne shvatljivo filozofiranje u slikarstvu. To je posao za literate, ali za slikare neka samo šare i kist govore. Što će mi slikarsko mudrovanje, kad ruka, ili noga ili glava ni jesu umjetnički prikazane.

Često sam se u Londonu namjerio na kakovog siromašnog samouka, koji bi komadom ugljena i bijelom kredom na uličnom pločniku u tren oka nacrtao ribe, brodove, konje i ljude. Okolo njih mnoštvo udivljenih gledaoca, a svaki bi ih obdario s bakrenim sitnišem. Za mene je takov siromašni samouk pošteniji i bolji umjetnik, nego svi kubisti,

I visited Rački on the first. He welcomed us quite warmly. We talked long of national motifs and agreed on the subject of the painting Strossmayer had ordered from me. None of it satisfied me, and then Rački, to remind me of Gundulić and without waiting for my reply, immediately grabbed "Osman" and began to read to me. When he reached the passage

"O virgin, so pure and so gentle,  
Who from that high and holy peak,  
In the sweet words of a dear song  
Laments for all poets.  
Sing now to me a lament,  
For the young Emperor in the east,  
To whom those merciless knights,  
Dealt death in his own Constantinople"

here I stopped Rački, saying that the painting was finished in my mind. I immediately made the first sketch; I hit the mark, as they say. I was satisfied, and so we easily agreed on everything else without Strossmayer's confirmation.

I also exhibited a painting of Bishop Strossmayer in Zagreb, which was painted in Đakovo. My work was praised by everyone. – It was because of this that Baron Ljudevit Vraniczany ordered a portrait of his late father, which I later completed in Paris from a photograph. The whole time, "Gundulić's Dream" was floating about in my head. It was a difficult subject, but a rich one worthy of a great master. I asked myself in wonder, how would today's "cubists" portray the painting expressed in those timeless verses! I simply cannot understand philosophising in painting. That is the task of the literati, but let only colours and brushes speak for painters. What use is sophistry in painting, when a hand, or a foot, or a head are not artistically portrayed.

In London, I would frequently happen upon some poor self-taught artist, who would use a piece of coal and white chalk to draw fish, boats, horses, or people on the sidewalk. And around them a





Vlaho Bukovac, Portret biskupa Josipa Jurja Strossmayera, 1892., ulje na platnu, 144 x 112 cm, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb

Vlaho Bukovac, Portrait of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, 1892, oil on canvas, 144 x 122 cm, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters, Zagreb

Vlaho Bukovac, svečana zavjesa u Hrvatskom narodnom kazalištu u Zagrebu  
Vlaho Bukovac, festive curtain at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb







Vlaho Bukovac: Razmišljanja o slikarstvu / Thoughts on Painting

futuristi i modernisti, što su svojim slikama unesrećili svijet. Imade vještaka, što i njih hvale i pišu hvalospjeve na ono, nešto izmazana, što oni zovu, da je umjetnost. Vele, da sve ono, što su Tizian, Paolo Veronese, Velasquez, Rembrant, Van Dyk, Rafael i Michel Angelo izradili, da je došlo doba, da se uništi. Riječju, da je sve to ništa i da umjetnost jedino s njima počima. Uvjereni su da umjetniku ne treba nauke, jer da ih škola samo kvari. Sve ono, što je istina njima je smiješno i s prijezirom na nju gledaju. Oni vele, da slikaju kvintesencu prirode, a glupak je svaki, koji ne razumije, što oni mrče.

Istina je, da je umjetnost u prvoj polovici XIX. vijeka bila u padu. Akademski recepti ubili su likovne umjetnosti. Na to su kao spasitelji došli impresionisti i naučili mlade naraštaje, kako da gledaju prirodu.

Kao voda i staklo, tako i vazduh, koji obuhvaća zemlju, ima svoju boju. Kad sunce rasvijetli vazduh, boja mu je potpuno modra i za to vidimo i modro nebo nad nama. Da vazduha nije, neizmjernost bi svemira, u kojoj se naša zemlja kreće, bila potpuno crna i vidjeli bi zvijezde u podne kako i u noći. Tu su istinu potvrdili svi zrakoplovci, jer što su više u visine išli, nebo im bilo tamnije, to jest vazduh bio je rjedji. Dan je zapravo vazduh rasvijetljen suncem: otuda modrina, što nas i zemlju obuhvaća. Otud pak slijedi, da su svi predmeti, koji se nalaze pod kapom nebeskom osvjetljeni modrim svijetlom. S tim otkrićem, ili bolje da kažem, tim znanstvenim razglabanjem okoristiše se impresionisti. A da je tomu tako, lako će se uvjeriti svaki čutljivi umjetnik.

Modra boja odrazuje se i na najcrnijim predmetima a osobito na olaštenim površinama. Najboljim primjerom je glava crnca, na kojoj sve vrvi od modrušastih odraza. Jedino je sunce žučkaste boje. Pružimo li ruku na sunce, opazit ćemo, da je put u sjeni modrušasta, a u sunčanom svijetlu, da je narančasto-žuta. Ovaj me kontrast od vajkada obmamio. Ništa divnijega od borbe tih dviju šara.

U zadnje sam se doba osobito udubio u studiju odražaja sunca i azura, pa su skoro sve moje posljednje slike izradjene u tom dvostrukome svijetlu.

crowd of people, amazed, would shower them with copper coins. I consider such poor self-taught artists truer and better artists than all the cubists, futurists, and modernists who have inflicted suffering on the world with their paintings. There are those who even praise them and write panegyrics to the smudges they call their art. They say that the time has come to destroy all that Titian, Paolo Veronese, Velasquez, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Raphael, and Michelangelo created. In a word, that all of it is nothing, and that art begins solely with them. They are convinced that the artist does not need learning, because schooling only spoils them. Everything that is true, they consider silly and view with contempt. They say that they are painting the quintessence of nature, and anyone who does not understand their scribblings is an idiot.

It is true that art was in decline in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Academic recipes had killed the fine arts. The impressionists came like saviours, and taught young generations how to view nature.

Like water and glass, so does the air surrounding the earth have its own colour. When the sun shines into the air, its colour is completely blue, and that is why we see a blue sky above us. Were there no air, the infinity of space through which our planet moves would be completely black, and we would see the stars at noon as we do at night. This truth has been confirmed by pilots, because when they would fly ever higher, the sky would grow ever darker – that is to say, the air would be thinner. Day is actually air lit by the sun; that is where the blue surrounding us and our planet comes from. It thus follows that all objects below the arch of the sky are lit with blue light. The impressionists made use of this discovery, or better said, this scientific babble. Any sensible artist will easily convince himself of the truth of this.

The blue sky also reflects on even the blackest objects, and especially on polished surfaces. The best example of this is the head of a black man, which is full of bluish reflections. Only the sun is yellowish in colour. If we turn our hand to the sun,





Vlaho Bukovac, Portret baruna Ljudevita Vranyczanyja, 1898., ulje na platnu, 80 x 79,5 cm, Moderna galerija, Zagreb.

Vlaho Bukovac, Portrait of Baron Ljudevit Vranyczany, oil on canvas, 80 x 79,5 cm, Modern Gallery, Zagreb

Mene izvanredno zanima sila šare, a onda spojenje ovih jakih vrijednota. Spoj i prelaz je vrlo težak, a tim veća je moja radost, kad mi i to, što je najteže u slikarstvu podje za rukom.

Jedino, kad je predmet osvijetljen suncem ili svijetlom ne prevladjuje modra boja. Onda su najjači tonovi žuto narančasti, ali modelacija samog predmeta već prelazi u modro. Ta je šara sve jača i jača i to prema tome, kako su slijedeće plohe udaljenije od glavnog sunčanog žarišta. Oni, koji stavljaju pravila, kako da se slikaju tkanine, krajine, voda, ljudi i ostalo, na krivome su putu. Umjetnost ne podnosi nikakvih recepta. Ona je slobodna, pa su sve moguće izradnje i tehnike dobro došle, samo ako vode k pravoj svrsi. Svijetlost je najveća istina i ljepota, jer bez nje bili bi slijepi od rođenja. Slavni Manet prvi je prokrčio novi put. Njegova je slava velika, jer je on prvi shvatio vječne zakone *plein-air* - a. On se oslobodio svih akademskih i školskih načela i iznio platno na čisti, božji vazduh. Crna pozadina i naglašavanje svijetla na glavnom predmetu bijaše načelo starih majstora. Sve to – i ako umjetnički izradjeno – ne odgovara istini. Još i danas mnogi umjetnik boluje od istih mana i slabosti a oslobodjenje od svega toga, bijaše veliki napredak nove škole. Danas slika nije više crna tačka na zidu, već je otvor u prirodu.

Šara je sve; svijetlost je šara. Crne šare nema, i kad u tmuni oči zatvoriš, opet nije tama crna, već iz nje vrcaju i kruže šarena sunca i zvijezde. Tko hoće, da crnom pozadinom istakne svijetlost, krupno griješi, jer ako je glavni predmet jako osvijetljen, to će odsjev toga svjetla odraziti se i na okolišne stvari, pa sve da su i one crne, bile bi osvijetljene odrazima.

U slikarstvu je pak uspjeli portrait vrhunac umjeća. Izraditi dobar portrait ne znači samo dobro vidjeti, već i razumjeti dušu onoga, koji pred tobom sjedi.

Obično se govori, da je crtanje lako naučiti, ali šarama da su teški poslovi. To je posve neispravn nazor. Poteškoća se ne skriva ni u crtanju ni u bojanju, već nada sve u pravome i nepogriješivom gledanju. Tu je sva snaga umjetnika. Vid je za slikara

we will notice that our skin in the shade is bluish, and orange-yellow in the sunlight. This contrast has always thrilled me. There is nothing more beautiful than the battle between these two colours.

In recent times, I have especially given myself to study of reflections of the sun and azure, and so nearly all of my latest paintings were made in this twofold light. I become exceptionally interested in the power of colours, and then in joining these strong values. Joints and gradients are quite difficult, and so my joy is even greater when I succeed even in this, which is most difficult in painting.

Only when an object is lit by the sun or by candle does blue light not reign. Then, the strongest tones are yellowish-orange, but the modelling of the object itself passes into blue. This colour is ever stronger on the basis of how far the following layers are from the main source of sunlight. Those who create rules as to how to paint fabrics, landscapes, water, people, and so on, are on the wrong path. Art tolerates no recipes. It is free, and all possible creations and techniques are welcome, however only if they lead to the right goal. Light is the greatest truth and beauty, because without it we would be blind from birth. The famous Manet took the first step on this new path. His fame is so great because he first understood the eternal laws of *plein-air*. He freed himself from all academic and scholastic principles and brought his canvas into God's fresh air. The black backdrop and accentuation of light on the main subject were the principles of the old masters. All of this – even if it is done academically – does not correspond to the truth. Even today, many an artist suffers from the same faults and weaknesses, and liberation from all this was the great advancement of the new school. Today, a painting is no longer a dark spot on the wall, but an opening into nature.

Colour is everything; light is colour. There is no black colour. Even when you close your eyes in the darkness, the darkness is not black - colourful suns and stars dance and circle around in it. Anyone looking to emphasise light with a black back-



ono, što je osjećaj za pjesnika. Oni se popunjavaju. Mnogi tobože umjetnici umriješ, a ne dosjetiše se toj priprosto i velikoj istini.

Svi najslavniji slikari bili su portraitisti. Dosta je da spomenem imena: Rembrant, Velasquez, Tizian, Van Dyck, a Leonardo, Rafael, Michel Angelo, Murilio, Paolo Veronese, Tiepolo, Rubens, Ribera, bili su – i ako majstori u kompozicijama – veliki portraitisti. Tko je kadar, da izradi dobar portrait, može da se okuša s najtežim problemima slikanja.

Neprestana vježba u crtanju pravi je pak put k savršenosti. Sve sastoji u tome, da sa par poteza izraziš pravi kret i značaj osobe ili stvari, a ostala izradba u boji tek je šala i igračka za pravog umjetnika. Crtanje je za slikara, što i kosti za ljudsko tijelo, a da je tomu tako najbolji je dokaz, što su neki slabi koloristi bili uvršteni među najslavnije slikare. Jest, nacrt je temelj kiparskoga i slikarskoga umjeća. Blago onome, koji to s lakoćom svlada. On je Majstor.

ground is far in the wrong, because if the main subject is strongly lit, that light will also reflect on the surrounding objects, and even if they were black, they would be lit with reflections.

In painting, a successful portrait is considered the height of skill. Painting a good portrait does not only mean seeing well, but understanding the soul of the person sitting before you.

It is usually said that it is easy to learn to draw, but that painting is difficult. This is an entirely incorrect view. The difficulty lies in neither drawing nor in painting, but in true and unerring vision. This is where all of the strength of the artist lies. Vision is to the painter what feeling is to the poet. They complement each other. Many supposed artists die without having realised this unsophisticated and great truth.

All of the greatest painters were portraitists. It is enough to mention their names: Rembrandt, Velasquez, Titian, Van Dyck, Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Murillo, Paolo Veronese, Tiepolo, Rubens, Ribera – all were, despite being masters in composition, great portraitists. Whoever is capable of painting a good portrait can tackle painting's most difficult problems.

Ceaseless practice in drawing is, however, the true path to perfection. It all lies in being able to express the true movement and meaning of a person or thing with a few strokes, and the rest of the composition in colour is a mere game to the true artist. Drawing is to the painter what bones are to the human body – the best proof of this is that some of the poorest colourists are considered some of the greatest painters. Truly, the sketch is the foundation of sculpture and painting. Lucky is he who learns this skill thoroughly – for he is a Master.