

Zbyněk Sekal | Things Are Moving Forward Slowly

September 10, 2015 – February 14, 2016

Museum of Modern Art | Triple Nave

AUTHOR OF THE EXHIBITION AND THE TEXT | Marie Klimešová

EXHIBITION CURATOR | Olga Staníková

TRANSLATION | Tomáš Havlíček, Lawrence Wells (Notes from Sekal's Diary)

PHOTOGRAPHS | Artist's archive, Oto Palán, Muzeum umění Olomouc

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PUBLIC RELATIONS | Petr Bieleš

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ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMMES | Jiří Bartoník

SPECIAL THANKS FOR THE KIND LOAN OF THE ARTIST'S WORKS FOR THE EXHIBITION | Mrs. Christine Sekal, Aleš South Bohemian Gallery in Hluboká nad Vltavou, Prague City Gallery, Klenová District Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art in Hradec Králové, Gallery of Modern Art in Roudnice nad Labem, Gallery of Central Bohemian Region in Kutná Hora, Gallery of Art in Karlovy Vary, Art Gallery in Cheb, Zlatá Husa Gallery, Landesmuseum Burgenland, Eisenstadt, Olomouc Museum of Art, National Gallery in Prague, Neue Galerie Graz am Universalmuseum Joanneum, Liberec Regional Gallery, North Bohemian Gallery of Fine Art in Litoměřice, East Bohemian Gallery in Pardubice, Czech and foreign private collections.

The exhibition project originated in cooperation with the Olomouc Museum of Art, Aleš South Bohemian Gallery in Hluboká nad Vltavou, and Arbor vitae Publishers, and with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the International Visegrad Fund.

„Things Are Moving Forward Slowly...“ All his life, Zbyněk Sekal repeatedly wrote the above sentence from Vančura's novel *Escape to Buda* in his diary. Along with his own text, which he published in the *Výtvarné umění* (Fine Arts) magazine in 1966 and which he called, in reference to André Breton, *Ralentir travaux LXV*, meaning *Slow Down Men at Work*, he reminded himself that his creative processes should consist of slow and precise meditation carried out by hand. The exhibition in Olomouc offers an essential overview of his work, which developed in multiple areas. Even though he graduated from the painters' studio at Umprum (prof. František Tichý, prof. Emil Filla) in Prague, he best expressed himself through plastic art and work with found material, from which he created hanging assemblages, known as assembled paintings, and spatial constructions, known as cases. Material was a challenge to him but it also set limits to the programme and morphology of his work. What makes Sekal's work so powerful is the combination of intellectual intention and intuitive understanding of the used "matter", fragments of disposed wood, metals, plastics, strings, and paper which bear witness to their former uses.

Zbyněk Sekal ranked among the great personalities of the Czechoslovak cultural scene. Besides his artistic work, he was a brilliant translator of difficult German texts and a leading representative of book graphics. In addition to the official

translations from the 1950s, including for example Clausewitz's most notable work *On War* and Feuerbach's book *On Religion*, he also translated Franz Kafka's and the Russian philosopher Lev Šestov's short stories just for himself and his friends. His broad interest in and deep insight into literature, philosophy, anthropology, black magic, and other areas influenced his artwork which is, on the one hand, directly impressive and, on the other, involves a great many references to such resources. At the age of eighteen, during the war, Sekal was arrested by the Gestapo and spent three and a half years in concentration camps. The experience influenced his entire life and one of the most valuable aspects of his work was as a means to him finding a way to cope with the trauma.

Surrealism was his most important creative impulse while he was still a student. In 1957, he joined the modernist group *Máj 57* (May 57) and exhibited with them until the group terminated in 1964. As the same time, he was considered to be an artist involved in the Czech Informel. In the 1960s he belonged to the circle around the Jindřich Chalupecký Gallery and the Václav Špála Gallery. He accentuated his inner independence from artistic trends and instead drew inspiration from literature and the phenomenological understanding of the world. His creative processes are characterized by his work with found worn-down materials in which he looked for traces of its memory: reflections of its stigmas. His work presents the broadest range of figuration.

Sekal fled the country after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Thus, he spent a major part of his artistic career in Vienna. His work returned to the context of Czech art only after 1989. Eighteen years have already passed since his successful retrospective at the Prague City Gallery. Last year's exhibition "Sekal and Japan", at the Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen demonstrated the great array and variety of ideas in his work, all of which are rather hard to comprehend, yet are exceptionally intensive and attractive. At the Olomouc Museum of Art, we have an opportunity to see prominent examples from all areas of Sekal's work: sculptures, assembled paintings, three-dimensional cases, drawings, collages, photographs, and examples of his works in the area of book graphics. In addition to his essential and famous works, the exhibition has also aimed to find and present newly discovered chefs d'oeuvre which will broaden our understanding of the artist.

A monograph including remarkable extracts from Sekal's diary will be published by Arbor Vitae publishing house on the occasion of the exhibition.

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