



МАРИОНЕТКИ

*Сирак Скитник. „Марионетки“ от
Чавдар Мутафов. 1920. Корица. [167]
Sirak Skitnik. "Marionettes"
by Chavdar Mutafov. 1920. Cover.*

Sirak Skitnik and the Bulgarian Book in the 1920's

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In the post-war years the Bulgarian book attracted special attention on the part of both cultural circles and the state. Just as in the fields of fine arts, literature¹ and the theatre, the prevalent ardour concerned the ways of attributing a definitely national aspect and high quality to the book. In the 1920's in the country a special attitude was cultivated in respect to fine graphic arts as well as polygraphy. A number of articles on book decoration, the letter, the type and ornament, the children's books illustration and the poster as a polygraphically circulated product were written by Chavdar Mutafov, Geo Milev, Sirak Skitnik and Nikola Mavrodinov. In 1924 Vasil Zahariev came back from a specialization in Leipzig and greatly contributed to that trend both as a lecturer in graphic

¹ National Literature and Arts Promotion Law. 1922.

arts at the Fine Arts Academy and as an artist with diverse manifestations.

The interest in and the attention paid to the book at the beginning of the 1920's coincide and are part of the aspirations of a new wave in Bulgarian art initiating the attempt at a "modern" expression by means of "the lost native". This new wave, heterogeneous in terms of style analogies and representatives, adopts a new attitude to the applied and circulated art types. In such an environment, the book turns out to be a beneficial field of realizations and experiments and, together with the illustrated magazines and newspapers, clearly charts "a map" of the artistic tendencies ranging

Сирак Скитник. Илюстрация в „Марионетки“ от Чавдар Мутафов. 1920. [167]
Sirak Skitnik. Illustration in "Marionettes" by Chavdar Mutafov. 1920.



from the luxurious/expensive to the popular/cheap.

Sirak Skitnik is one of the most renowned representatives of the modern, contemporary thought in the post-war art. His manifestations in the field of the book² are crucial for the realization of his artistic views in the 1920's as well as for our perception of those views today. Sirak Skitnik takes part in the formation of the outlook on the artistic book as a unity of text and object in a

Сирак Скитник. Рисушка за „Марионетки“ от
Чавдар Мутафов. 1920. [168]
Sirak Skitnik. Drawing for “Marionettes” by Chavdar
Mutafov. 1920.



period of purposeful attempts in this field.

In the pre-war period the book and luxury magazine decoration basically consisted of Secession / Art Nouveau vignettes, frontispieces and tailpieces, often taken without any effort from various sources. It was usually eclectic, without any relevance to the text. There are only few exceptions to the pattern³. It was in that environment in the first post-war years that appeared Sirak Skitnik's pictures in luxury magazines and literary collections⁴, and the first books designed and illustrated by him.

Those first pictures in “Zemya” (Land) magazine, the “Zhetva” (Harvest) collection and “Vezni” (Scales) magazine bear some distinguishing features like the taste for the beautiful, the decorative, for curved lines and forms of visual ambiguity and play. The black India ink, laid with

a brush on coloured paper, creates a feeling of texture. That taste is associated with Secession / Art Nouveau manifestations in its Russian variant,

² Books containing Sirak Skitnik's pictures: “Poems” by Edgar Allan Poe, 1920 - 5 pictures; “Marionettes” by Chavdar Mutafov, 1920 - 6 pictures; “Bulgarian Ballads” by Teodor Trayanov, 1921 - 7 pictures; “A Knight's Castle” by Hristo Yassenov, 1921 - 1 picture; “In the Wide World” by Dimo Syarov, 1924 - 11 pictures; “Krali Marko” by Angel Karaliychev, 1925 - 9 pictures; “Folk Riddles” collected by Trayko Simeonov, 1926 - 16 pictures; “A Not-born Maid” by Ran Bosilek, 1926 - 11 pictures.

³ Cf. Kirov, M. Bulgarian Illustration Development Trends in the Period of 1878 - 1920. In: History of Bulgarian Fine Arts. Essay Collection. Vol. II, 1984.

⁴ “Zemya” (Land) magazine, 1919, N 1: “The Balkan” - p.7, “A Fairy Tale” - p.11; N 2: “Masks” - the cover; The “Harvest” Collection, 1919: the picture on p. 99; “Vezni” magazine, 1919, year I, N 3: “Woe” - p. 66; N 5: “Mothers” (a variant) - between p.138 and 139; N 11: “The Castle” - p.350.

with “modern style” and “Mir iskustva” (The World of Art)⁵. In the country, such manifestations are not limited to Sirak Skitnik’s pictures and vignettes. At the same time other artists like Ivan Milev, Nikolay Raynov and Stoyan Raynov create drawings, mostly for magazines, that are akin to the same spirit. However, Sirak Skitnik’s India ink drawings and vignettes display all those influences in a most comprehensive way. Ivan Milev’s pictures bear some similarity to them in terms of imagery and quality.

The selected wider range of stylistically related works of art attest to the receptivity of Bulgarian artists to the later manifestations of the Secession/Art Nouveau in its Russian, Munich and Viennese variants. The latter seem to be perceived as an opportunity for a modern artistic expression, for opposing Naturalism, Academism, and Impressionism. The artistic output represents a second version of Secession / Art Nouveau in Bulgaria though different from the pre-war one and refracted in every particular case by a number of other layers - German Expressionism, the interest in Munk, Gauguin, Matisse, the attention to Primitivism in Russian and German art, etc.

Among the already mentioned early pictures by Sirak Skitnik, it is the “Mothers” composition (published in “Vezni” magazine, book 5) that stands out. In terms of iconography, semantics and the character of stylization, the author believed that the composition was an exponent of the cultural tradition and his circle perceived it as a modern find⁶.

*Сирак Скитник. Рисуника за „Марионетки“ от Чавдар Мутафов. 1920. [169]
Sirak Skitnik. Drawing for “Marionettes” by Chavdar Mutafov. 1920.*



⁵ Cf. Popova, M. Sirak Skitnik's Illustrations in “Marionettes” by Chavdar Mutafov. “Izkustvo” (Art) magazine, 1988, N 2, p. 35-41.

⁶ With his review of the book written for “Vezni” magazine, Geo Milev subscribes to Teodor Trayanov's opinion: “ As far as Sirak Skitnik's pictures to “Bulgarian Ballads” are concerned - one of the best achievements of the artist so far - [...] I can hardly add anything to what Trayanov says in the epilogue of his book: What strikes the eye in the wonderful pictures to this book is not only the original artistic device, but the depth of the conception as well. The mother of every single agonizing warrior is a sorrowful Mother of God whose eyes are crying not only above the head of her dying son, but also for the complete destruction of her homeland”. “Vezni” magazine, year III, 1921-1922, N 6, p.111.

That is why it appeared in other variants in “Krustyu Sarafov” collection (1921) and in “Bulgarian Ballads” by Teodor Trayanov (1921) - on a separate page as well as on the cover. The images of woeful mothers with black kerchiefs were to be permanently introduced into the iconography of the artists from the 1920's. The subject of death had its numerous interpretations, especially in drawings, during the war period and the first half of the 1920's (Pieta, Mourning Women, allegorical figures of Death (a skeleton with a violin, with a scythe), still lifes of the Vanitas type - with skulls, soldiers's boots, etc.).



Сирак Скитник. Театър. В Юбилеен сборник „Кръвство Сарафов“, 1921.
Sirak Skitnik. Theatre. In “Krustyo Sarafov” collection. 1921.

Sirak Skitnik's drawings from 1919 do not bear a direct relationship to any text in the sense of illustrations. In the Zhetva (Harvest) collection, the picture accompanies poems written by Sirak Skitnik himself (on the same unfold). In Zemya (Land) magazine “The Balkan” drawing is on the same page together with an extract from Pencho Slaveykov's “Symphony of Despair”, however, not as an illustration, but as a result of inspiration. “The Fairy Tale” appears among the pages containing Sirak Skitnik's article “Do we have any art criticism?” without any literary parallel. In “Vezni” the India ink drawings are published as an artistic appendix and an example of modern art. The drawings decorate the book entity in the spirit of Secession / Art Nouveau, turn it into a luxurious and expensive product of polygraphy.

An accomplished manifestation of this artistic stage of Sirak Skitnik is his participation with 5 pictures in the luxurious edition of Edgar Allan Poe's “Poems”, translated by Georgi Mihaylov in 1920. That edition with its “hundred separate books on expensive paper” was welcomed as a special event among the cultural circles. In an article on the poems and their translation published in “Zlatorog” magazine,

Konstantin Konstantinov points out the “exquisite and stylistically of great merit” appearance of the edition. He gives very high praise: “The book is illustrated with 5 original drawings by Sirak Skitnik that contribute to the overall appearance of the edition in terms of style and artistry”⁷. In Vezni⁸, Chavdar Mutafov focuses on Sirak Skitnik’s drawings. What he points out first is that “the text contains 5 images by Sirak Skitnik that accomplish the edition: thus, the book acquires style”. This is one of the first incarnations of the idea of the integrity and stylistic merit of the book, which is to be given as an example over the next years. Sirak Skitnik’s works for Edgar Poe’s poems are somewhere between the free drawing and the illustration. Chavdar Mutafov regards the non-literal correspondence between their suggestions and those of the poems as justified. “Instead of the romantic visions of a sick and tender soul in which the sad whim is combined with peculiar spleen - here some tense and stiff lines are drawn through which the dream comes back to the bottom of the eyes, motionless and woven in heavy black nets. [...] Thus, however, he does not illustrate but gives a personal expression of an elementary interpretation of a feeling, which, passing through the stylistic properties of the line and mass, acquires a visible imprint and is bound organically into an image. That is why those 5 pictures are a parallel visibility of a given internal experience rather than a concrete realization of an external event into an image - thus, they come nearer to the hidden basis of Edgar Poe’s poems: the irrational”⁹.

The parallel between the drawings accomplished in themselves and the literary text, their own value, the expensive edition of numbered circulation - all of these are related to the Secession/Art Nouveau practice with respect

Сирак Скитник. Маска. В Юбилеен сборник „Кръстьо Сарафов“. 1921. [174] Sirak Skitnik. Mask. In “Krustyo Sarafov” collection. 1921.



⁷ Konstantinov, K. “Poems” by Edgar Allan Poe. “Zlatorog” magazine, 1920, year I, N 8, p. 707-708.

⁸ Mutafov, Ch. Sirak Skitnik’s Pictures to Edgar Allan Poe’s “Poems”. “Vezni” magazine, year II, 1920-1921, N 2, p. 88-90.

⁹ Ibid.



Сирак Скитник. Скица за Театър
(в Юбилеен сборник „Кръстьо Сарафов“).
Sirak Skitnik. Drawing for Theatre
(in “Krustyo Sarafov” collection).

to the book. Although it is a single variant, it reminds us of the ideas and realizations in the publishing practice of Ambroise Vollard during the first decades of the century. In Bulgaria, Sirak Skitnik is a significant representative and promoter of such a view of the artist's presence in the book. He is a contemporary of the modern European concept of the artist who assigns a peculiar, different quality to the book, who makes the editions magnificent and of equal interest both from a literary and artistic point of view. Despite the fact that the drawings are not produced by a printing technique,

both Teodor Trayanov's “Bulgarian Ballads” (1921) and Ran Bosilek's “A Non-born Maid” (1926) realize that concept. Sirak Skitnik exposed his pictures to “A Non-born Maid” as a separate series at the “Native Art” Society's exhibition in 1926.

In 1920 another book containing Sirak Skitnik's drawings was published - “Marionettes” by Chavdar Mutafov. Here, the relationship between the images and the text marks a new stage in Sirak Skitnik's attitude to the book, his openness to another circle of artistic phenomena. I would not say that this is a subsequent stage in the artist's development. His anti-dogmatic nature and polyvalent inclination urge him to experiment in different directions. In his manifestations as an artist and critic he transmits a wide range of the artistic problems of the time. In this respect, I want to mention Sirak Skitnik's vignettes to the “Krustyo Sarafov” collection (1921) which seem to be of deliberately different formats and frames - from oval to square, collected as a mosaic. They have various stylistic characteristics - from the arabesques and the S-shaped Secession lines in the two oval vignettes with the statuette and the flowers to the angular deformities of Expressionism in the square and in the narrow vertical rectangle with masks.

The drawings to the “Marionettes” stir various reactions and bring

about controversial opinions. They are so unexpected that, together with the overall design of the book entity, even the extreme adherents to Modernism in Bulgarian art cannot take them in. "The edition is gorgeous - in terms of style, but is not harmonious with the content's tone. The bent, graceful and subtle lines of Chavdar Mutafov's style are juxtaposed to the square format and the square type of the book together with the heavy angular line and the broad (black and ultra-marine) splashes in Sirak Skitnik's illustrations. The harmony has been lost and that loss, to some extent, distorts the impression of the exquisiteness of the edition. [...] the style of the illustrations does not correspond to Chavdar Mutafov's style - Sirak Skitnik is the least appropriate illustrator for the "Marionettes" in spite of the drawings' merits, in spite of the book's merits. This disaccord strikes the eye all of a sudden and should be mentioned¹⁰". What are the artistic views and concepts of the book hidden in Geo Milev's words? They include the requirement for a precise correspondence between the artist's style and that of the author, i.e. for some subordination of the artistic individuality. Perhaps it is the strongly expressed artistic individuality of Sirak Skitnik that makes Geo Milev consider him to be inappropriate for a "Marionettes" illustrator. Yet, in this sense, Sirak Skitnik is not appropriate for an illustrator at all. It is not accidental that all the books containing his works refer to them as "Sirak Skitnik's drawings". The author creates freer links with the text, gets inspired by his personal reading of the text. As far as the "Marionettes" are concerned, it is essential to see to what extent Chavdar Mutafov's innovative prose has urged the artist to overcome the frames of the imagery associated with "Mir iskustva" (The World of Art), with the late Secession / Art Nouveau and to acquire another, different form of expression.

Сирак Скитник. Рисунка. В Юбилеен сборник „Кръстьо Сарафов“. 1921.
Sirak Skitnik. Drawing. In "Krustyo Sarafov" collection. 1921.



¹⁰ Milev, G. Chavdar Mutafov: "Marionettes". "Vezni" magazine, year II, 1920-1921, N 4-5, p. 190-193.



Сирак Скитник. Илюстрации
в „Народни залъгалки“ от
Трайко Симеонов. 1926.
[191]



Sirak Skitnik. Illustrations in
“Folk Riddles” by Trayko
Simenov. 1926.



While staying in Petersburg, Sirak Skitnik had the chance to get acquainted with the new trends in Russian and French art - his impressions from the art exhibitions in Petersburg, from “A Hundred Years of French Painting” exhibition, which was quite an event, were published in Democratic Review magazine, Sofia. His literary-artistic letters display a keen interest in and approval of the primitivism tendencies in the works of Nataliya Goncharova and Michail Larionov: “...And all of this to be seen through the child’s eyes of the artist: uncunningly, simply and almost awkwardly, characteristically to the point of caricature, having primeval pantheistic understanding. Hence the love for the primitives of all nations, for the naive expression of things - symbols having seemingly childish illiteracy, yet showing knowledge. [...] We should admit that it [this trend] holds out interesting prospects in the new Russian painting¹¹”. Sirak Skitnik rounds off his impressions from the French exhibition with the following conclusion: “Seurat and Signac are down a blind alley [...] and it is obvious among contemporary artists that Cezanne and Gauguin dictate the future precepts of French painting¹²”. It was as early as those years that Sirak Skitnik had the luck to acquaint himself with the new tendencies in art after Impressionism and after Secession / Art Nouveau and they greatly contribute to the formation of his experience as a critic. Their acquisition as an artistic

experience, however, is much later, in his works from the 1920’s. His pictures to the “Marionettes” are perhaps the first manifestation.

How do Sirak Skitnik’s drawings for the “Marionettes” and his following works for books correlate to the European

¹¹ “Democratic Review” magazine, 1912-1913, N 5, p. 648.

¹² Ibid, p. 656

tendencies in the 1920's and the new phenomena in our art that form Bulgarian Modernism circle?

The European art from the post-war years displays an aspiration for breaking the boundaries between the different trends: Fauvism, Cubism, and Expressionism, for infusing new meaning into their formal-stylistic devices. Individualism, in its broadest sense, the separation from all theories, the greater subjectivity in the attitude to the visible reality, the creation of imaginary pictures, the denial of "the beautiful": - all of these characterize the new tendencies. In this respect, Surrealism is the most significant phenomenon in the art from the period between the two world wars and is the basis of the innovative processes in the artistic language.

Sirak Skitnik's articles show the synchrony between his ideas and the new tendencies in Europe. The theories and the artistic practices of Modernism in pre-war Europe have not affected Bulgarian art, there are no spaces of interaction. A freely perceived (post)-Impressionism in the landscape, also due to its connection with nature, as well as equally free versions of Symbolism and Secession / Art Nouveau gain ground in Bulgarian art. However, the articles by the contemporary-oriented critics that are acquainted with the topical tendencies in European art, among whom Sirak Skitnik is, contain the requirement for individualism and the understanding of the subjectivity of the artistic image, although in a most general way. "Art is just a creative soul which has identified itself in front of the visible. That is why it is as whimsical as the soul itself, it is often incomprehensible as the soul is [...] Such an approach to art sets us free from the shackles of any school¹³." We can find both new understanding of the artist's attitude to the visibility and the denial of the aesthetics of "the beautiful" - "never before has art been less aesthetic



Сирак Скитник. „Неродена мома“ от Ран Босилек. 1926. Корица. [192]

Sirak Skitnik. "Non-born Maid" by Ran Bosilek. 1926. Cover.

¹³ Sirak Skitnik. Old and New Art? "Vezni" magazine, year I, 1919-1920, N 7, p. 212-213.



Сирак Скитник. „Марионетки“ от Чавдар Мутафов.
1920. Корица. [335]
Sirak Skitnik. "Marionettes" by Chavdar Mutafov. 1920. Cover.

and more humane as it is today", "[...] art should stop being a decoration, it should go back to the primeval clairvoyance!" - we can also find the interest in the primitive¹⁴.

Sirak Skitnik's views seem to be more radical than his manifestations as a book artist. In fact, the drawings for the "Marionettes" are found by his contemporaries to be unexpectedly "lacking beauty", to have unusual deformities and presence of colours. The character of the images and their fantasticality are stimulated by and dependent on another

artistic reality - Chavdar Mutafov's prose, defined as decorative. The appearance of puppets, masks, gnomes and theatrical attributes raise the question of the presentation of a fictitious reality. The interest in the imaginariness and in this respect in the theatrical reality is characteristic for Bulgarian art in the 1920's. Masks, puppets, etc. are drawn. In 1924 the first Bulgarian puppet show theatre was founded. Boris Denev creates its puppets. Artists like Ivan Milev, Ivan Penkov and Sirak Skitnik¹⁵ feel the necessity to create in the field of the theatre. It seems that through the medium of the theatre and the book cover of fiction, the creation of the fantastic visual image is assisted and made possible¹⁶.

Sirak Skitnik's pictures for the "Marionettes" show, beside the above-mentioned innovations, some links with his already familiar India ink drawings. The complicated linear structure, the abundance of rhyming

¹⁴ Sirak Skitnik. The Secret of the Primitive. "Zlatorog" magazine, year IV, 1923, N 1, p. 3-7.

¹⁵ In 1924 Sirak Skitnik stages and creates the scenery for "Monna Vanna" by Maurice Maeterlinck.

¹⁶ In an article on the occasion of the Moscow Art Theatre's visit in Sofia, Sirak Skitnik advances his view of the theatre as "an aesthetically disciplined reality", of "the unity of style" and the particular place of scenery in it. Cf.: Sirak Skitnik. Moscow Art Theatre. "Zlatorog" magazine, year I, 1920, N 9, p. 767-771.

lines and the colour formation create the impression of harmony in spite of the deformities. In this respect they are adequate to Chavdar Mutafov's prose that is of different aesthetics, but is exquisite and harmonious.

Sirak Skitnik never oversteps the boundaries of the beautiful.

Expressionism enters his artistic experience not as an ideological artistic stand, but as certain formal devices that coexist and do not clash with those of Secession / Art Nouveau. This does not underrate Sirak Skitnik's drawings. Owing to the quality of their accomplishment, they manifest the basic peculiarities of Bulgarian art from the decade.

Sirak Skitnik's views of the book in the 1920's also find an expression in his work on children's books. "Krali Marko" by Angel Karaliychev, "A Non-born Maid" by Ran Bosilek and "National Pastimes" by Trayko Simeonov, all of them having Sirak Skitnik's drawings, are all books that belong to the most prestigious children's book series in the 1920's - "Library for the youngest".

In "A Non-born Maid" the fairy tale is the source and ground for the fantastic image and the beautiful.

"[...] Sirak Skitnik has a straight eye and firm hand that help him close that fairy tales' cycle within the exotic framework of stylized images - a cycle both internally and externally united - there is "the prince" and "the non-born maid", the eagles, the devils, the ghosts and the



Сирак Скитник. Илюстрация в „Неродена мома“ от Ран Босилек. 1926. [192]

Sirak Skitnik. Illustration in "Non-born Maid" by Ran Bosilek. 1926.

Сирак Скитник. Илюстрация към „Неродена мома“ от Ран Босилек. 1926. [193]

Sirak Skitnik. Illustration in "Non-born Maid" by Ran Bosilek. 1926.



houses - watching, asking, knowing everything.

Can we call that fabulousness art? - Definitely much more so than the permanent acts and poses that do not do or say anything.” - writes Chavdar Mutafov ¹⁷.

Sirak Skitnik has the freedom to express his sophisticated sense of colour, using several pastel tones. The pictures as well as the overall design - the format, the size, the type and the paper rate the book among the most luxurious and harmonious children's editions in the 1920's. Yet, despite the direct connection of the drawings with the fairy tale plot, Sirak Skitnik perceives them as a self-dependent cycle as well. Within the book's unity, their own value is emphasized by the fact that they are placed on a separate page, which the artist does in other books as well¹⁸. The cycle of pictures for “A Not-born Maid”, accomplished in a larger format, is exposed independently at the “Native Art” Society's exhibition in the year of the publishing of the book. Thus, the author expresses his view of the equal in value presence of the artist in the book.

Sirak Skitnik's images to “Pastimes” display his penchant for the primitive and the children's drawing¹⁹. They capture the viewer with their whims and beauty. The puppets, the scarecrow and the mummer's mask, with the saturated combination of ink blue and black, just belong there. As a suggestion they are in harmony with the text. By introducing that composition into the children's book, Sirak Skitnik takes part in a wider Primitivism wave, including the children's illustrations by Max Mezger, Ivan Milev and Iliya Beshkov. Whereas the illustration is a constant field of work for Beshkov, the children's illustration is just a temporary passion for Mezger and Ivan Milev as well as for Sirak Skitnik and is connected with more general artistic aspirations. In the case of the Primitivism tendency, the children's book provides further grounds for its realization.

Sirak Skitnik's work in the field of the book in the 1920's is connected with a wider circle of phenomena, which are new for Bulgarian art, and raises the more general issue of the peculiarities of Bulgarian Modernism. When we discuss Bulgarian Modernism from the

¹⁷ Mutafov, Ch. Art Week. “Native Art” Exhibition.” Slovo” journal, 1926, May 10, issue 1176, p. 2.

¹⁸ Another example is the pictures in “Bulgarian Ballads” by Teodor Trayanov.

¹⁹ An evidence for the permanence of that interest are the children's pictures from the personal collection of Sirak Skitnik, which he offered for the Children's Picture Exhibition in 1936 (part of that exhibition is preserved in the Central State Archives, f. 44). Cf.: Dimitrova, T. Sirak Skitnik and the “New artists”. “Izkustvo” magazine. 1982, N 5, p. 45.

1920's, we should bear in mind the specificity and the different aspects of the phenomenon. Modernism in Bulgaria is most vividly and undoubtedly personified by people of new and active stand on the world, who juxtapose the energetic and thorough intellectual presence to the contemplation and isolation of Symbolism's nature. Such personalities in Bulgarian culture are Geo Milev and Chavdar Mutafov²⁰ who realize their activity in many directions, who aspire to a total artistic manifestation and demonstrate their views of one's place in society. In this respect, Sirak Skitnik is among such personalities. The outlined characteristics are to a greater or lesser extent inherent in a number of Bulgarian intellectuals from the 1920's and hence they make the issue of Bulgarian Modernism convincing, mostly as a phenomenon of worldwide cultural importance rather than as density of the various tendencies.

The left ideology of the avant-garde art makes its way into the country not as an attitude to the history of culture, but as a bare social stand in direct and socially engaged works, most often designed for mass circulation. Expressionism influences can be found in graphic arts, in the left-wing press, in the manifestations of Metzger, Zhendov, Kyulyavkov, in the works of Ivan Milev, Iliya Beshkov and Peter Morozov. There are few exceptions in this respect - expressionist drawings that are not politically involved - like Mircho Kachulev's works for Crescendo magazine and for Geo Milev's Expressionist Calendar.



Сирак Скитник. Пейзаж с църква. [336]
Sirak Skitnik. Landscape with a Church.

Another expression of Modernism in Bulgaria is associated with those works that overcome the academic views of the picture (the requirements for the classical perspective, tone, distribution of light and shade, etc.) as well as the impressionist approach and that show an attempt at synthetic thinking, an interest in the line and local colour²¹. In

²⁰ Cf.: Marinska, R. Ivan Boyadzhiev. The exhibition catalogue. Sofia, 1991.

²¹ That interest is displayed in art criticism, in numerous articles on the decorative as a feature of the artistic work and its transformations in history. Such an example of a discussion of the topical problems of the artistic form is Chavdar Mutafov's article: The Line in Painting. "Zlatorog" magazine, year I, 1920, N 4, p. 337-340.



*Сирак Скитник. Замък.
В списание „Везни“.
1919-1920 / 12.
Sirak Skitnik. Castle.
In “Vezni” (Scale)
magazine. 1919-1920 / 12.*

many cases the artists look for / demonstrate support in the church and applied arts, thus creating a new iconography of the Native Art movement. The artists from this circle work and experiment in applied arts as well, in response to the idea, generated elsewhere, of the thorough manifestation of the artist.

The decorative tendencies in Bulgarian art and their motivation drawn from the “native” idea are ascertained and discussed in Bulgarian art criticism²². However, the interest in decorativism is not just a local phenomenon. In 1925 the first International Exhibition of Decorative Arts took place in Paris²³. French art from the 1920's also displays the trend of Art deco of the picture akin to the Art Nouveau experience. The

²² Cf.: Avramov, D. On “Native Art” Movement in Bulgarian Painting. “Art Studies Quarterly”, 1971, N 4, p. 10; Avramov, D. Maystora (the Master) and His Time. Sofia, 1989, p. 128-131, p. 349-355; Dimitrova, T. The “Native Art” Problem in Bulgarian Art Criticism from the 1920's. “Izkustvo” magazine, 1986, issue 3, p. 2-6.

²³ Sirak Skitnik writes an article in this respect: International Decorative Exhibitions. “Slovo” journal, 1924, September 6, issue 685, p. 4. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the lack of “modernized Bulgarian external and internal architecture”, of “modernized Bulgarian dish, cooker, lamp, curtain, fireplace, etc.” that are worth displaying at such an exhibition. “[...] Everything in the Bulgarian city house has the mark of an inferior European article”.

beautiful and the harmonious are kept as a norm but are not perceived as self-sufficient. Along with them, specific attempts were made at semantically loaded iconography of the “native” tradition. Such a feature is also present in modern Bulgarian art.

His contemporaries define Sirak Skitnik as a modernist and today we perceive him as a representative of the new wave in Bulgarian art from the 1920's because, without denying the artistic genealogy, he works beyond the immediate attitude to the visibility²⁴ and asserts his opinion of the artistic work as a valuable in its own self artistic reality. Sirak Skitnik contributes to the general trend of decorativism and imparts to it a personal nuance with his aptitude for plot and the romanticism of the fairy tale and the legend, and the book is just the right field of his realization. Edgar Poe's “Poems”, Teodor Trayanov's “Bulgarian Ballads”, Ran Bosilek's “Fairy Tales” - they have all been successfully chosen by Sirak Skitnik..

The 1930's saw a change in the focus of the artistic problems in Bulgarian art. The picturesqueness and the object-space environment combine the aspirations of the New Artists Society, with whom Sirak Skitnik associates his creative and critic activities. In that period the artist creates only book covers employing various types, geometrical and colour compositions. His interests drift away from the book illustration. In the 1930's the illustration became a specific artistic activity. The ideas of the thorough artistic manifestation, of the synthesis of arts faded and gave way to the focus on the picture.

First published in: Art Studies Quarterly, 1991, special edition.

²⁴ Chavdar Mutafov views Sirak Skitnik's landscapes as an example of a new expression in landscapes: “Sirak Skitnik's landscapes really lack these dimensions because the basis of the illusory-spatial in the perspective is rejected together with the perspective itself”. In: Mutafov, Ch. Landscape and Our Artists. “Zlatorog” magazine, year I, 1920, N 2, p. 162. In this respect, maybe it is worth remembering that Sirak Skitnik does not have academic education. The naked body and the figured compositions were never the focus of his works. However, in the 1930's, it was in the landscape and still-life that Sirak Skitnik came back to the visibility as a source of creative impulses, having become aware of the exhaustion of the fantasy plot and decorativism. In those classical genres Sirak Skitnik embodies the event “between the external world and the artist's soul” about which he wrote even in 1922.