

SURREALISM

Stane Kregar was already painting during his adolescent years. At the time he was also interested in sculpture and music but later gave up both. In high school he illustrated a student paper of the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium called *Domače vaje* (Eng. Home Exercises) and before starting his painting studies, he did some paintings that can be classified as realism influenced by new objectivity. In Prague, he was inspired by Czech cubism and surrealism and, while experimenting, he gradually developed his own surrealist style. This phase can be observed in his works between 1935 and 1939. After returning to Ljubljana in 1935, he participated in various joint exhibitions also in the exhibitions of newly-founded societies held in the Jakopič Pavilion. For Ljubljana's art public, his surrealist paintings were something new and shocking but with his personal interpretation, Kregar wanted to shake people and draw them to a new symbolic world. European surrealism radically combined the conscious and unconscious mind and uncontrolled subconscious impulses of social and personal traumas with erotic undertones, but there are no such extreme dimensions and complexity in Kregar's works. His extensive knowledge of symbolism, iconography, mythology, literature, and art history found expression in his works and he masterly combined these elements into personal art exhibitions. In these works of art, Kregar subjectively transformed everyday scenes into something dream-like and imaginative. They are depicted very poetically with alterations to both colour and shape. In doing so, he was more interested in artistic problems rather than the content. Already from the early years of his career, his opus included the motifs that he then used his entire life: ancient heroes, girls, pilgrims, the sea, cultivated ground, etc.

Kregar did not create many surrealist paintings; the most important ones are housed in the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana. The only painting from his surrealist period displayed at the Kregar Gallery is *Odysseus*. It depicts a mythological hero that Kregar portrayed throughout his career as a kind of archetype and symbol transferred from ancient Greek myths to the present time but always interpreted through his current personal view. Contrary to the heroic interpretation of mythology, the artists of the 20th century mostly reached for tragic destinies of ancient heroes and philosophers and Kregar's paintings also belong to this group. His ancient heroes are withdrawn such as in dreams and almost spiritually enlightened. The painter himself said that he transformed the everyday world into a more beautiful one with a touch of another, not only earthly dawn.

Another feature of Kregar's early works are classical elements such as portrait heads and parts of the body or elevated metaphorical and associative atmosphere that, in addition to other great

European modernists, above all reflects the influence of the main Italian representative of metaphysical painting Giorgio de Chirico.

POETIC COLOUR REALISM

In the late 1930s, many artists moved away from radical trends in art and resorted to poetic or colour realism, which got its name from its lyric nature and colour compliance. In Slovenia, it was developed under the influence of Slovenia's art and also West European movements of Parisian painting. French painters – who after avant-garde returned to reality, order and peace, and painted classical genres using traditional techniques – became new role models. Kregar produced paintings in a realist style approximately between 1939 and 1951. Upon reviewing Slovenian painting of the period, one can say that some of his contemporaries outshone him in a particular genre. Although Kregar's works of this period differ from each other in quality, he still produced some exceptional pieces of art during that time. At the beginning, his realism was deeply symbolic but later he reached for a wide variety of classical iconographic topics: self-portrait, portrait, act, figural group, genre, still life, veduta, and landscape. This pre-war decision for realism was not only a consequence of following the European styles, but also a decision of the majority of Slovenian artists to retreat to the private sphere at the time in which it was at least desired if not ordered to glorify big topics of revolution and to get free after WWII. At the same time, this was a preparation period for the start of the development of post-war high modernism in fine arts from the mid-1950s.

The majority of Kregar's paintings from the period of poetic colour realism belong to various private owners and to the National Gallery's Government Art Collection, which is the third biggest collection of Kregar's works. It was after WWII that Slovenian politicians bought works of art to decorate venues for protocol services, such as Brdo Castle, Villa Bled, Villa Podrožnik, the Constitutional Court, Villa Tartini, and others. The art collection of the then executive council was taken over by the National Gallery in 1986 and also consists of many of Kregar's paintings. The Kregar Gallery houses a collection of paintings from his period of poetic realism, in which portraits prevail. His remarkable early work from 1935 named *A Boy* belongs to the period before the start of surrealism and reveals Picasso's influence. In pictures portraying girls and women, one can observe Kregar's typical melancholy reaching even to the absence of figures. Figural compositions named *Sonata* and *In the Painter's Studio* are symbolist paintings portraying a group of beautiful dreamy girls who play music, comb their hair or stare into the distance and are a regular feature of Kregar's works pointing to the remote world full of melancholy that is often shown in his paintings.

Kregar also depicted himself several times. On his self-portraits, he always look young what suggest that he had a lively spirit. In addition to self-portraits, portraits and figural compositions, the Kregar Gallery also houses the painting *Still Life with Tilen* and paintings of pastoral scenes that already reflects his next stylistic direction.