

Eva Švankmajerová

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Exhibition of paintings and drawings

This retrospective exhibition, featuring paintings and drawings of Eva Švankmajerová (1940 – 2005), presents a representative cross section of the artist's work from the mid-1960's to 2005: from her ironic, pseudo-naïve beginnings (on display, for example, in her well-known Emancipation Cycle, in which she paraphrased famous pieces of world art, reversing the gender roles depicted in them), through her distinctive, strikingly expressive figurative work, in which her approach organically develops in connection with the newly defined principles of Czechoslovak surrealism from the late 1960's and early 1970's, whose leading representative Eva Švankmajerová would become in the ensuing decades. In collaboration with the movement's leading theorist, poet, and organizer Vratislav Effenberger, along with Švankmajerová's husband, filmmaker and artist Jan Švankmajer, and others, Švankmajerová would systematically investigate and develop new forms of creative imagination, new ways of playing on sensibility and dissimulation, new reflections of existential trauma, and sarcasm toward society and values. Since the beginning, a central theme in her painting has involved the so-called lot of women, which she does not, however, understand in primarily feminist terms: rather, she draws on problems arising from the most intimate experience of erotic partnership and of her own family life. An overt, glaringly presented (but also latently present) sexuality, which forms the basis of many of her paintings, drawings, and ceramic objects, becomes a medium, expression, and accompanying phenomenon of the dialectically lived and perceived conflict of both sexes, equally valued. In this sense too, Eva Švankmajerová's work can be seen as a personal, highly subjective and yet at the same time generally valid and socially communicated reflection on the embodiment of the human—and especially the female—body, with all the subtleties, pains, pleasures, and idiosyncracies of the psychophysical essence of human existence. And she deepens this experience, taking it all the way to the borders of being: from a fusion of self-torment with a depressive memento mori and a remarkable existential sarcasm, there emerge the baroquely dark pastel drawings of the artist's final creative period, whose message is chillingly timeless and paradoxically superpersonal: the power of the fragile imagination cannot overcome the hopelessness of Death—but can elevate it to the level of liberating spiritual experience.

František Dryje

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