



Women Sculptors

Selection of Significant Czech & Slovak Sculptors

Resume (catalogue)

Interest in women in art arose during the feministic discourse of the 1970s, and female art theoreticians and artists began to map women artists in individual disciplines. They searched for their predecessors, works, stories, diaries, photographs and reflections in the “official” picture of art whose creation was dominated by men. They were “in search of” women painters and sculptors. Many attracted attention or won deserved fame and recognition only when they were older thanks to the excitement created by the second wave of feminism.

The traces of the presence of women in art history represented an important document for the 1970s that helped to build the self-confidence of authors and subsequently complement and revise the history of marginal and uncharted territories. Several documents mention the presence of women, but their names, works and contributions are unknown and almost invisible in this most distinctively male discipline.

The about-face in the study of women in our art history and theory came about only after the changes in society in the 1990s. Several monographic exhibitions of women sculptors have been organized since then, and history has recently been complemented by other chapters dedicated to female figures in sculpture through exhibitions, monographs and other forms of factual and visual documentation. Revealing these forgotten women in art is also connected to the political détente, because some female artists were part of the unofficial scene and their artistic expression was not ideologically suitable. Furthermore, sculpture – especially in public spaces, was more “guarded” and molded by the governing ideology than painting or decorative art which provided “protective wings” to avant-garde, alternative and experimental forms of art which were dependent on developments in Western Europe. An extensive memorial exhibition of Mária Bartuszová took place in Slovakia in 2005; a monograph of Erna Masarovičová was published in 2007; exhibitions of Hana Wichterlová, “the first lady of Czech sculpture,” were held in the Czech Republic (from 1990 to 2013), and the exhibitions of Eva Kmentová grew in number after 1989. The monograph of Vlasta Prachatická was published (2001), while the exhibition and catalogue of Zdena Fibichová (2013) as well as the exhibition of Mara Durasová with its comprehensive monograph (2014) were implemented. From the Czech milieu, the representative exhibition entitled *3 sochařky (3 Women Sculptors)* of 2008 (Věra Janoušková, Eva Kmentová and Alina Szapocznikowá) is also relevant. The return to Czechoslovakism has a historical justification in the former joined state which encouraged the migration of figures, the linking of ideas and the integration of the two nations despite the differences in their cultural background. The influence of the Czech school of sculpture of the first half of the century on the development of Slovak art life and the lives and works of certain Czech figures in Slovakia, the exhibiting and reflection of Czech figures in Slovak state art collections, the study of Slovak male and female sculptors at Czech schools and vice versa all deserve mention. After 1918 and the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic, higher educational opportunities for women arose and



the first Slovak women artists studied at and graduated from academy programs in Prague. From the beginning of the first republic, emerging Slovak sculpture was modified by developments in Czech art and French modern art mediated through Czech figures. The role of this study and exhibition is to supplement the history of female figures in modern Czechoslovak sculpture who for a long time remained on the sidelines and out of the spotlight. The revision and supplementing of history and the publicizing of omitted and marginal events, facts and figures should correct the picture of modern history which would be incomplete without the emancipation efforts of female artists. In order to understand the development of art history in post-socialist countries, a revision is called for regarding the role of women in 20th century sculpture - not as unknown models, muses or lovers of sculptors, or prototypes of petrified beauty in sculpture allegories, but as sculptors themselves.

The gender baseline as the main criterion for the selection of research topics related to female figures in sculpture did not materialize out of thin air. Mária Orišková studied and wrote about this topic in her text *Ženy s dlátom v ruke: sochárky a historiografia (Women with Chisels in Their Hands: Women Sculptors and Historiography)* which inspired a closer view of female figures in this world of men by focusing on the work, genres, materials, techniques and fates of women artists. Even Barbara Hepworth, the “Classic” of modern sculpture, realized that she had to intermedicate personal facts in her works. She believed that art was either good or bad and that it should be *gender free*; she was also keenly aware of the differences between women and men that could affect how a work was accepted, but also how it was created.

The figures for this exhibit were selected from a long list of unknown names, including, hyphenated names. We have focused on female artists who graduated from sculpture study programs, because “lay” sculpting, and establishing oneself in competitions and on the art scene was not possible without a proper education. The artists studied in this project were not determined by critical and public acceptance and fame; we will meet artists who were involved in sculpture only at the beginning of their careers, or who sporadically returned to sculpture in addition to other activities, or whose works were covered by the dust of depositories for several decades. We also included artists from the interwar period for whom sculpture was only an episodic affair, along with the new postwar generation who appeared on the scene at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s and who today are winning in-memoriam recognition in the international context (E. Kmentová, M. Bartuszová).

The study of female sculptors is the outcome of primary research and is of a historical rather than theoretical nature with the task of identifying places and dates. Any attempt at writing history has its limits and will always result in a report that is neither complete nor exhaustive, but it is a record of the state of research and its reflection of the available literature, works, biographies, archives, photographs and other materials; it is also based on oral history and personal interviews. It is built on a subjective selection of sculptresses and enlightened by the knowledge of feminist art which focused on the search for specific features of female sculpture in motifs, materials, and techniques, and the professional and personal paths of individual women sculptors. Interwar sculpture is studied in the context of former Czechoslovakia, while the postwar years and socialist period are more distinctively mapped with respect to the developments in Slovak art among female artists selected from the unofficial Czech scene. Not



many sculptures were created by women in the interwar and postwar periods. Due to physical limitations, unsuitable backgrounds and other women's obligations in society, these works are of a chamber nature and smaller in size – ceramics and ceramic sculpture from the period between the wars and artistic jewels from the 1960s. The leeward side of decorative arts was reserved for women, but it also suited them. However, some succeeded in breaking through and asserting themselves even in the implementation of monuments; and during the building of socialism, the first academically educated generation of sculptresses expressed themselves by “decorating” interiors and exteriors. Decorative ceramic sculptures and small statues of animals and genre scenes were supposed to bring warmth to modern interiors. Several interwar artists dealt with these lovely, non-confrontational themes and created humorous little sculptures which show taste, feeling, the eye and hand of a woman and the influence of modern art. Our research focused on formally trained female sculptors and brought about the realization that liberation from sculpting conventions towards more topical media (object, environment) was first experienced by Eva Kmentová, Maria Bartuszová and artists who, although they expressed themselves through spatial media, studied other artistic disciplines.

The conventions of sculpture and academic training seemed to prevent overlapping and discourage artists from transcending borders, and strong traditions held firm. Therefore, the concept of this exhibition is exclusively based on conventional sculpture genres. New media and related issues from the 1960s have received extraordinary attention in our art history and theory after 1989 and new chapters of modern sculpture history based on political, sociological, economic and gender factors need to be opened. To date, research has resembled a mystery novel in many aspects. Except for Vlasta Prachatická and Klára Pataki, all of the aforementioned female artists are deceased and therefore investigations frequently ended in failure or only second hand exposure to sculptures – through photographs and reproductions. Through the processing and publishing of this “issue – non-issue” of the female sculptor, we will succeed in filling in a gap, discovering lost works or at least contributing to the history of the heretofore non-existent atlas of sculptors outside the mainstream.