

Stanislav Hanzik

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Stanislav Hanzik was fourteen when the Second World War ended. It is not by chance that I begin with this fact. All rational conclusions which try to place the sculptor's subsequent work in a causal nexus with his impressions and experiences from the War are predestined to failure. No one knows, nor can anyone know, according to which laws the experiences of boyhood - an "organism" entirely exposed to the world - enter an individual life, not to mention their role in the specific nature of a sculptor's individuality. Furthermore, if this sculptor extricates himself from the rigid order and opinions of his teacher, and if he disassociates himself from the strict intellectual order of the era in which he grew up (and with which he conducted an honest dialogue), namely, at the age of thirty, then his work will be characterised by what lay in his adolescent subconsciousness which escapes our definition. During the period 1960/61, typified by a fresh intensity in his artistic program, Hanzik produced simultaneously several sculptures which were completely different from anything he had done before. However, despite their differing motifs, they do retain an aspect of homogeneity: a psychologically crucial element of a specific humanism which belongs, as I am convinced for the reason of its vitality and immediacy which has nothing in common with acquired experiences, to that "wartime youth". Why this is so, I do not know; perhaps even Hanzik himself does not know.

It is neither coincidental that these sculptures determined all the fundamental principles underlying his sculptural expression and their spiritual atmosphere for the next seven years until now. These works are as follows: Welder 1960/61 and Old Man 1961: Dialogue (in the Style of Moliere) 1962, Dialogue (Old) 1962, Small Rhapsode 1962, Rhapsode 1963, Large Rhapsode 1963, Old Man and Child (Simeon) 1963, Kuros-1944 1964, Pilgrim 1967. Miner with Tool 1961: Dialogue (Courteous) 1962, Dangerous Bird 1962, Hercules with Snake 1963, Bedrich Smetana 1964. Gorgon-Hiroshima 1961: Torso 1961, Dialogue (Fight) 1962, Dialogue (Hidden) 1962, Danae 1962, Torso 1962/66, Danae 1967.

Hanzik's teacher, Jan Lauda, always encouraged his pupils to seek the character of the chosen material and respect the three-dimensionality of the sculpture, principles which Hanzik honoured as well - although in a completely different way. But, perhaps it is these circumstances and emphasis of the psychological human element in his work, or both, which make some people call his art insufficiently "modern or current".

The "idea of metamorphosis" evoked by the psychosis of "current trends" over the last few years shows that art is increasingly more a question of mere technique and material and so the artist continues to do what the technique and the issues connected with it require of him. It is the substitution of the dominant function of life with intellectual abstraction and speculation. When I say this, I do not mean that Hanzik's approach is the only possible one, the only path to "true art"; I am just stating that the stimulus for individual exchange cannot be merely technical in nature or of the spiritual nature which comes "from outside", unless it is a mere fashionable trend, i.e., something which is replaced and "interpreted". Conversions occurred in Hanzik's work but he does not make interpretations and this is clearly the reason why he is not highly regarded among "interpreters". He is not alone in this respect, but does it matter?

I have introduced three approaches, or developmental currents, in which the sculptor's imagination chooses experimentation. These also testify to the essence and character of his vital spiritual strength and to the type of sculpture which materialises from his ideas. We should first note, however, what the sculptor's ideas are expressing and the nature of his motifs or themes. Above all, we discover that for this sculptor only one shape matters - the human shape, its observation and study. There are no signs of discontinuity here. His main focus is always human vision and the depiction of nature. He has three motifs or themes which are constantly in a stage of development: the torsos of a meditating man, the conflict of a woman - torso, and the struggle of a man - namely, continuity, struggle, and the cessation of life. In our contemporary sculpture, Hanzik represents aesthetic activity which "summons" the power and strength of a man living, even now, in anxiety evoked by his wartime experiences, an anxiety which has become as "universal as the events which evoke it" (Garaudy). A learned misconception might prompt these torsos to be seen as allegories inspired by classical mythology. Modern sculptors turn to mythology to define the magic in relationships between man, life, and nature which it captured as an enduring, aesthetic virtue and lasting application, and not for the sake of archaic symbolism. Hanzik develops the contemporary emotional intensity of life and its dominant features in these three motifs.

Is it then possible to judge the essence of the sculptor's vital spiritual strength and the type of sculptural materialisation of his ideas simply by his thematic orientation and motifs? Can one unambiguously claim that, in this, he appears as a sculptor with a sense of reflection, i.e., the sensuous materialisation of certain intellectual ideas or ideals? A "thematic" assessment of his work would lure us to this notion. I believe that such an approach is reflexive itself and attributes the sculptor with something from outside, like the one who claims to have always fostered the traditions of classical realism. The truth is that works such as Old Man, Kuros, and the Rhapsodes are associated with the traditions of pre-classical Greece, Gorgon and Danae are closer to the local baroque tradition, and Miner with Tool and Hercules foster links with modern expressionism. This alone clearly indicates that the sculptor was not seeking to achieve the ideal in beauty of expression, although the origin and type of materialisation of this force are rooted in various of the principles and in the clarification of their mutual contexts.

Thus, we find a marked difference in the origin and type of materialisation between the Old Man sculptures, the Rhapsodes, and Kuros on one hand, and Gorgon, Danae or Miner, and Hercules on the other, while Danae and Kuros visibly incorporate both distinct principles: the principles of organic and constructive forms. The fact that the sculptor does not "limit" these works strictly to one principle means that he protects his forms from steering them towards a single canon. It is chiefly in this that I perceive the nature of his pure, original, and spiritual vitality: a direct expression of nature embracing the full depths of theme and motif, intense and concealed in volume. An expression such as this does not arise from the sensual symbolisation of a thought's intellectual origin (a typical phenomenon of the classical tradition).

It is probably in this context that I would consider the remarkable and non-academic idea underlying the following words by Auguste Rodin: "There is no need to create. To create, improvise - these are words which mean nothing. Genius comes only to those who know how to use their eyes and their intelligence". The woman, mountain, or horse is formed according to these principles. "A thing can be beautiful if it is true to life, but only in the above sense since "true to life" does not mean a copy of nature, nor does it mean the true nature of speculative thought".

When I speak of the strength of expression in Hanzik's sculptures, I do not intend the viewer to see this strength merely in the wake of the sculptor's struggle with the physical properties of the material, manifested in the laws of balance, load, the centre of gravity,

and the weight of the human body. In certain respects, it might indeed seem as if the strength of expression is substituted by shifting the load from its own centre of gravity, resulting in the struggle of two forces as the artist attempts to balance a failing weight. This is a baroque tradition with its dramatic pathos and, as I have said, the sculptor draws from it what he needs. Nevertheless, tension such as this, created for an independent dramatic effect, is not typical for Hanzik's spiritual vitality and does not determine the strength of expression in his sculptures. The stability of the sculpture does not come from its base which transfers the former's centre of gravity to its own material; instead, at least in the majority of cases, it adjusts itself to the centre of gravity of the overall volume. This then develops freely and ultimately finds its own stable centre of gravity which in turn develops freely and seeks perpetual alignment to compensate for the shifted load. This notion fully corresponds with Hanzik's spiritual vitality, its ability to express nature in such a direct way that it contains an intensity of motif in its very volume. The artist thus betrays a strength disciplined in "serving the idea", an idea rooted in the organic process during which it becomes an abstract notion.

The strength of expression of Hanzik's sculptures is generated when the abstract idea, materialised by the volume and intensity of his motif, acquires a concrete form in order for it to become, once more, an abstract concept for the viewer, i.e., a spiritual value. Thus, it may transpire that his sculptures reflect numerous feelings in different people, from meditative, balladic, dramatic impressions to sensual impressions, from Dionysian joy to a Platonic conception of the world. And everyone would be justified in what they feel!

Hanzik's works show that their relevance is not determined by the contemporary character of their theme but by the special nature of the motif chosen by the sculptor and its expression which give the theme its relevance and inner sense.

It is said of Hanzik that he is a sculptor of "sculptural orientation", a brilliant modeller, and hence he is necessarily bound to a tradition which does not allow him to experiment with different materials and techniques. I regard this as the chimera of "interpreters" and I agree with H.Read who stated that "...the dispute between sculptors who carve or chisel and sculptors whose model is more one of ethics than aesthetics. Respect for the material is an aesthetic mandate in the same way respect for nature is: to favour stone instead of clay or the chisel instead of one's own fingers is a matter of emotional preference. The accomplished sculptor is able to use all kinds of materials from clay to

obsidian, from wood to steel". The exhibited works by Hanzik clearly demonstrate Read's highly just and precise definition.

The important position this sculptor enjoys in contemporary Czech art is unquestioned. We should not yield to the pressure of a reality which may have brought fresh sculptural qualities to life but which, at the same time, also requires us to acknowledge its privilege as a higher form of sculpture, as if art had always been founded on the dogma of a single principle.

I understand and admire this new sculptural essence not because it prevails in present conditions but for its many innovative traits. However, I do not think that it replaces something else that was here, or something which is different, since development "in sequence" is typical for the development of art in general, and not development from a lower to a higher form. Picasso is not "more" than Rembrandt, nor is Moore "higher" than Donatello.

The painter has everything "available" to him, the sculptor, in the end, has only the human form or his "correlation" with the universal, introduced by new sculptural qualities. What remains open to sculpture after this is a frenzy of materials, techniques, an analogy, a metaphor of what is fundamental, the materialisation of what painting has "at its disposal", or, in the end, an expression of originally applied industrial art, symbolised in sculptural form. This is only the beginning of sculpture. The rudimentary problem of today's sculpture is therefore not a question of "figurativeness" or "non-objectivity".

Without doubt, the endeavours of Hanzik, unmistakable from the point of view of issues which matter, represent one of the essential stages of this process of which we are a part. Even his collaboration in a number of isolated architectural-sculptural projects (in Most, Teplice etc.) indicates that he seeks sculptural expression and its function in a broader context than the sculpture as a single artefact, without one being directed through the other.