

WASSIL IVANOFF

(1909–1976)

EXHIBITION “TRIBUTE TO WASSIL IVANOFF”

Max-Pol Fouchet

Wassil Ivanoff was born on May 20, 1909 in Sofia (Bulgaria). He first devoted himself to music (violin). Then he entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. He left in 1939. In 1937, he participated in the 12th Exhibition of Bulgarian Painters. He will therefore participate in all Bulgarian national exhibitions until his death.

“The oeuvre of Wassil Ivanoff belongs in Art’s domain, definitely; and the skill manifest in his images, the very virtuosity with which he throws onto the black background the white or colored form, the certainty of his draughtsmanship and purpose, won’t let one doubt that. Nevertheless, his artistry is but a means, a servant to a poetry, a thought, a vision transcending the purely esthetic accomplishment, revealing a singular depth, irreducible to any other, unique. We have watched Wassil Ivanoff in front of his black sheet, grabbing the white chalk. He handled it with the mindboggling rapidity of lightning. As a thunderbolt would suddenly scribble its signature upon the sky and for an instant snatch out of the night a whole landscape, so would Wassil Ivanoff’s hand draw out of the black signs and forms, all with their contours and their shadowing. We realize being in the presence of one of those creators who are, by rights, the guardians of light. Make no mistake: that dexterity doesn’t result from a lightness of touch bred by exercise. Here all comes from the inside, and it is an inside that knows obedience. Wassil Ivanoff’s images spring from the world which he carries within himself, shapes from a universe long carried and long pondered. Apparently, the artist would endow the image of his vision with a characteristic simultaneously objective and non-objective, somewhere between reality and irreality, opening for us an in-between passage, a road that he invites us to take.

Ivanoff's world is – here, and we are in it. We couldn't be elsewhere. So we look at it, we live it, the look becomes life. Face to face with such images, should we be speculating that we are on a planet where trembles become tremors that cause, here the erection of a bloc, there the leveling of a structure? The stature of the sporadic human figures helps us to realize the monumentality of the mysterious event. They are so minuscule, standing before these stones, between these rocks, down in the gullies and canyons, up on the scattered ledges. What is the opera these actors are in, with its scenery of Goetterdaemmerung? Are they witnessing the fall of a Walhalla, resulting from a wrong done to a Rite or a Spirit? Their pantomimic occasionally suggests a stupefaction at perceiving ruins of things that may be deciphered as fantasmic sanctuaries of yore, along petrified forms, seemingly eroded by time, looming like effigies of abandoned potencies.

So, would we be witnessing a genesis? Great shapes arise, curl around the voids left by them, fall down, crawl up, white or colored, in perpetual motion or in monumental fixation in space. So often endowed with eroticism, in the primary meaning of the word, they appear to be on a quest for other forms. A mystery is transpiring, doubtless the highest of all: the want of the other, the want of unity with the other, the hope for couple, for the abolition of differences and distances in love. In other words, a quest for unity, quest physical and metaphysical, unsatiated, unsatiable. Free for everyone to invent...

Art is about making visible the invisible in us. Each act of cognition is, actually, a recognition. There is an art fulfilling this role, the art of visionaries – the art of Blake, of Monsu Desiderio, and of Wassil Ivanoff. A rare phenomenon, but happening in Ivanoff's work: the utmost deracination gets revealed as re-racination, the inexpressible gets expressed, and the stream merges its murky origins with the limpidity of the estuary.

Max-Pol Fouchet

Max-Pol Fouchet, 1913–1980 is of the intellectuals that came from Algiers to mainland France, eager to make it aware of modern art and social change (one of

them was Camus). Writer, critic and journalist, he “found himself”, when in the 1950s became an anchor of the first cultural programs on French TV. He aimed at using art to help people raise their eyes from the Lebenswelt to the stars above. His programs would be remembered as a paradigm of persuasiveness, taste and simplicity, steering clear of vulgarization and snobbishness. Simply, his heart was always open to beauty and goodness, as we can see from his exalting lines about Wassil Ivanoff.