

George Grosz and Croatian Art between the Two World Wars

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Abstract

The paper analyses the key aspects of George Grosz's influence on Croatian art between the two World Wars. A number of artists, especially the members of the association *Zemlja*, considered Grosz to be an author of similar ideological belief, who advocated an active role of art in society. Grosz's standpoints thus indirectly influenced the formation of the overall cultural atmosphere, marked by the polarization of the entire artistic scene. The artist became one of the key reference points and a figure cited by those who exerted a crucial influence on the formation of Croatian artistic scene between the two World Wars – the writer and one of the most prominent intellectuals Miroslav Krleža and visual artists Krsto Hegedušić and Ljubo Babić. The paper also addresses the circumstances regarding the organization of Grosz's solo exhibition in Zagreb in 1932, along with an analysis of the reception of his work among Croatian art critics.

- [1] The role and importance of the painter and graphic artist George Grosz (1893-1950) has already been firmly determined in art history as particularly significant in the key artistic turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century.¹ As one of the most influential personalities of avant-garde movements of the period, Grosz participated in the formation of innovative stylistic and visual approaches and techniques. On the other hand, his overall activity – as artist and theorist – displayed the full strength of the influence of ideological discourses on artistic practices. In that sense, any attempt to examine his intriguing life and complex oeuvre – which provides an exhaustive, in-depth picture of the divided German society in the period between the end of World War I and Hitler's accession to power – offers a myriad of different perspectives and interpretative possibilities.
- [2] In many aspects, the case of George Grosz and his influence on Croatian art differed from the influence of other artists who played a crucial role in the development of Croatian modernism. Manet's and Cézanne's work appealed to Croatian artists in certain aspects of composition and modelling. Such reflection of the vital points of modernism in painting has proven to be a crucial paradigm on the path towards the understanding of a painting as an autonomous visual fact. However, Grosz's influence was not limited solely to the formal aspect, which implies the acceptance of particular elements of visual

¹ George Grosz and his work have been the subject of numerous monographic studies, exhibitions and scholarly papers. See editions with selected relevant bibliography: Hans Hess, *George Grosz*, London 1974; Uwe M. Schneede, *George Grosz. Der Künstler in seiner Gesellschaft*, Köln 1975; *George Grosz: Berlin – New York*, exh. cat., Berlin-Düsseldorf 1994; *The Berlin of George Grosz: Drawings, Watercolours and Prints, 1912-1930*, ed. Frank Whitford, exh. cat., New Haven-London 1997.

syntax; there is hardly any evidence of literal adoption of Grosz's style in the work of Croatian artists. Nonetheless, affinities on a formal level indisputably exist and bear significance. Croatian art history was prone to assign them primarily to the inclination towards the "primitive", in the context of the formation of the elements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a reaction to Expressionism and its influence on the developments in Croatian art.² The influence of Grosz's views and artistic production on Croatian art between the two World Wars, discussed and interpreted in this paper, was by no means univocal, but can be discerned and analysed on several levels. The most prominent is certainly the ideological level: a number of Croatian artists active in the interwar period, especially those belonging to the Association of Artists Zemlja (Udruženje umjetnika Zemlja),³ saw Grosz as an artist of similar ideological beliefs who, through analogous visual language, advocated an active role of art in society. Thus Grosz's standpoints indirectly affected the formation of the overall cultural atmosphere, marked by the polarization of the entire artistic scene. In that sense, through frequent referral to Grosz, Croatian art criticism also stepped forward to new modes of interpreting a work of art. Furthermore, an adequate reception of Grosz's work, especially his graphic oeuvre, made a significant contribution to the recognition of graphic art as an essential medium of social art. Hence the artist became one of the key reference points and a figure cited by those who exerted a crucial influence on the formation of Croatian artistic scene between the two World Wars – the writer Miroslav Krleža and visual artists Krsto Hegedušić and

² Croatian art history has referred to Grosz mainly in the context of ideological and formal aspects which marked the work of the protagonists of the Association of Artists Zemlja. Cf. Josip Depolo, "Zemlja 1929-1935", in: *Nadrealizam. Socijalna umetnost. 1929-1950*, exh. cat., Beograd 1969, 36-50; Božidar Gagro, "Zemlja naspram evropske umjetnosti između dva rata", in: *Život umjetnosti* 11/12 (1970), 25-32; Igor Zidić, "Slikarstvo, grafika, crtež", in: *Kritička retrospektiva Zemlja*, exh. cat., Zagreb 1971, 11-18; Ivanka Reberski, *Realizmi dvadesetih godina u hrvatskom slikarstvu: magično, klasično, objektivno*, Zagreb 1997, 49-52. Particular elements of influence have been sought for and identified in works of art preceding and not related to the artistic circle around the Zemlja Association. Thus, for example, certain elements of spatial organization and simplified rendering of singular figures in Milivoj Uzelac's painting *Self-portrait in front of a bar* (1923) can, according to Zvonko Maković, be associated with the work of George Grosz. Cf. Zvonko Maković, "Milivoj Uzelac: Autoportret u baru", in: *125 vrhunskih djela hrvatske umjetnosti*, exh. cat., Zagreb 1996, 72. On Grosz's influence on Uzelac's drawings and illustrations see also Frano Dulibić, "Erotski crteži i grafike Milivoja Uzelca (1917-1920.)", in: *Peristil* 44 (2001), 111-112. Jasna Galjer gave an analysis of the reception of Grosz's work in the context of the "clash on the left": Jasna Galjer, *Likovna kritika u Hrvatskoj 1868- 1951*, Zagreb 2000, 228-239.

³ Association of Artists Zemlja (1929-1935) was one of key artistic groups in the history of Croatian modern art, a collective and organized phenomenon of left-wing political orientation and pronouncedly socially engaged motivation. Through firmly set programmatic goals and clearly formulated manifesto, it brought together painters, sculptors and architects. Its activities were concentrated on changing the dominant social values and criticism of contemporary society, with motifs based on the visual interpretation of the problems of urban and rural life. The consequences of the Association's brief existence were far-reaching: it assigned a precise, active social role to artistic production in Croatian cultural milieu, while ideological disagreements among its members and confrontations with their opponents remained live issues even after the official ban of its activities, extending even to the period following the Second World War. The painter and graphic artist Krsto Hegedušić was one of the initiators of the formation of the Association and its main ideologist. In an endeavour to form an independent national visual expression, he engaged in teaching peasant painters in the village of Hlebine, thus setting the foundations of the so-called School of Hlebine and Croatian naïve art.

Ljubo Babić. In this sense, Krleža's views can be recognized as particularly important in the evaluation of the acceptance of Grosz's work. This paper will also discuss in detail the reception of Grosz's solo exhibition in Zagreb (1932) in which notably graphic works were on display (cf. figs. 1, 2, 3, 4). Precisely the modes of understanding of his work, revealed in the writings of prominent critics and artists, would show the complexity and entanglement of all relevant aspects of his influence.

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- [3] Like Filip Latinovicz, the main character of one of Krleža's key novels,⁴ who stands out as a paradigm of an artist of interwar Croatia in search of his own identity and the definitions of the identity of his native environment, Grosz was also an artist continually tormented by the same questions.⁵ This is testified by his personal, as well as artistic path: after his initial inclination towards the Expressionists, he participated in the formation of the *Berlin Dada* immediately after the First World War, finally to become one of the key protagonists of the left-wing fraction of German neorealism. With the end of the war, Expressionism, with its firmly determined stylistic features and meanings, could no longer adequately cover all the problems of everyday society and produce a reaction to them. The desire for new ways of artistic engagement within society was perceived as an opposition to Expressionism, although these emerging stylistic currents had inherited several key formal elements precisely from Expressionism.⁶ In Croatian art, Expressionist tendencies – based on the reformulation of European models – in 1920s gave way to complex neorealist tendencies of different provenance. The influence of German art, especially art engaging in the issues of contemporary society and thus containing a "critical" component, had grown increasingly important for the younger generation of artists.⁷ This influence, evident in the attempt to comment on the everyday society, i.e. the existential problems of the individual that can be applied to society in general, emerged within the activities and exhibitions of several artists in mid-1920s, denominated by Ivanka Reberski as "the prologue of Zemlja".⁸

⁴ Miroslav Krleža, *Povratak Filipa Latinovicza (The Return of Filip Latinovicz)*, Zagreb 1932.

⁵ On Grosz and problems of his own identity see Frank Whitford, "The Many Faces of George Grosz", in: *The Berlin of George Grosz*, 1-20; Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism Art and Idea*, New Haven-London 1987, 148. In this context one can also consider the circumstances of Grosz's name change: given his animosity towards nationalist options, Grosz changed his personal name from German to an English variant. It was a form of protest against German nationalism which proliferated during the First World War, and corresponded to his fascination with the United States of America, where he would emigrate after Hitler's accession to power.

⁶ See Peter Selz, "German Realism of the Twenties. The Artist as Social Critic", in: Peter Selz, *Beyond the Mainstream. Essays on Modern and Contemporary Art*, Cambridge 1997, 80-81.

⁷ See Reberski, *Realizmi dvadesetih godina u hrvatskom slikarstvu*, 23, 49-52.

⁸ Ivanka Reberski, *Oton Postružnik*, Zagreb 1987, 23; Reberski, *Realizmi dvadesetih godina u hrvatskom slikarstvu*, 52. The activities included the exhibition of graphic works (entitled *Grafička izložba*) of six artists (Augustinčić, Grdan, Mujadžić, Pećnik, Postružnik, Tabaković) held at Salon Ulrich in 1926 and Grotesques by Oton Postružnik and Ivan Tabaković exhibited that year in the same gallery.



1 George Grosz, *Dismissed / Ausgebotet*, c. 1920, lithograph / paper, 750 x 540 mm, National and University Library Print Collection, Zagreb, inv. no. GZGS 407 grosz 2 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011). Photo: Goran Vranić

[4] Grosz's work, as well as his opinions on the role of art in society, were by then undoubtedly familiar to Croatian artists, since translations of his early key texts appeared in Croatian periodicals in mid-1920s. In 1924 the periodical *Radnička borba*⁹ published the translation of an excerpt of one of Grosz's programmatic and frequently cited texts, which appeared under the title "Zu meinen neuen Bildern" in the magazine *Das Kunstblatt* in 1921.¹⁰ It was followed by another important text by Grosz published in the periodical *Književna republika*, which can be considered a starting point of the reception of his theoretical and political views in Croatia.¹¹ Such interpretation is attested by several arguments: besides reporting and explicating the statements which form the

⁹ –, "Umjetnost i revolucija", in: *Radnička borba* 9 (1924), 4. The article consisted of the translation of the first part of Grosz's text "Zu meinen neuen Bildern", preceded by a short introduction, but with no precise mention of the original text. The translator is referred to only by an initial D. The text itself systematically lists basic Grosz's opinions on art, the central point being the attitude of the artist towards "the masses", i.e. the subdued working class and its position in society.

¹⁰ George Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern", in: *Das Kunstblatt* 1 (1921), 11-14.

¹¹ George Grosz, "Mesto biografije", in: *Književna republika* vol. 2, 1 (1924-25), 46-48. The text was written in 1920 and published in the Berlin-based magazine *Der Gegner* the following year: George Grosz, "Statt einer Biografie", in: *Der Gegner* 3 (1920-21), 68-70.

basis of the author's attitude towards art (the demand for revolutionary art which must express political opinions in a revolutionary manner; the idea of contemporary art which depends on the middle class and dies with it; the opinion of the importance of ideological attitudes of the artist against irrelevant biographical positions), the periodical which published the text had a considerable influence within the national cultural scene of the period.¹² Furthermore, the translator of Grosz's text was probably Miroslav Krleža himself,¹³ an author and critic who would become most responsible for the dissemination of Grosz's artistic and ideological heritage. Krleža's key text, published in *Jutarnji list* (1926) and again in *Književna republika* (1927),¹⁴ in many ways determined the general attitude of the future members of the Zemlja Association towards the position and tasks of art in society, and influenced the formal level of their artistic production. Moreover, the text on Grosz bore a programmatic meaning for the Association of Artists Zemlja, and presented a source of direct stimuli.

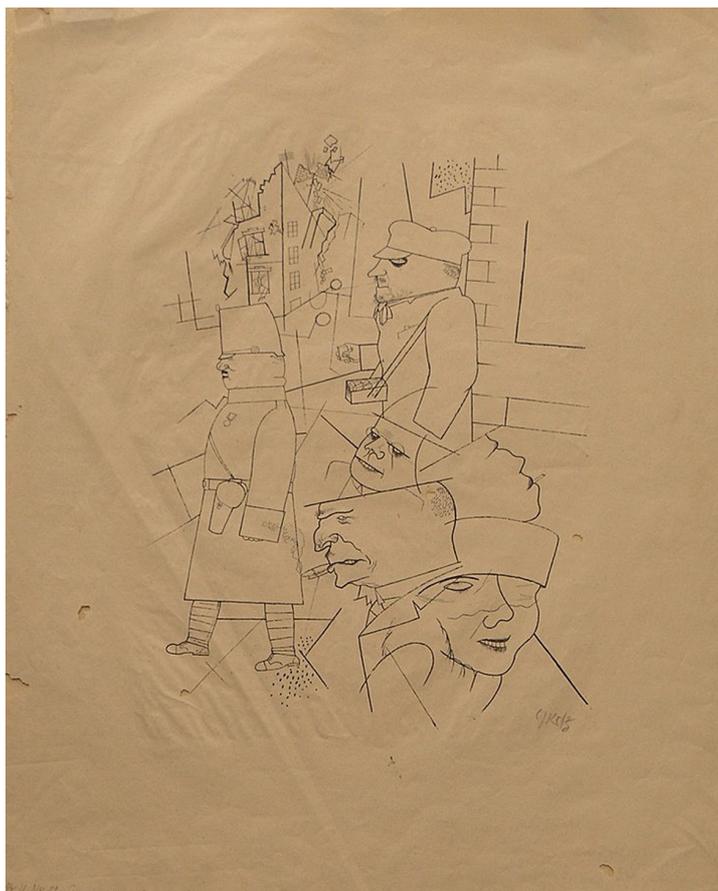
- [5] George Grosz occupied a prominent position in Krleža's complex and often contradictory views on contemporary art. In the period of over a decade following the First World War Krleža assumed firm standpoints on the most important issues in Croatian art. He argued primarily against the tendency to form a national visual expression conforming to the "Vidovdan ideology" of the sculptor Ivan Meštrović, based on the idea of South Slav unification. Krleža considered Meštrović's merging of mythological patterns and derivations of secessionist syntax in service of a political idea (which resulted in a repressive multinational Yugoslav state) to be generally harmful and especially unproductive for national artistic development. He also formed a negative opinion towards avant-garde tendencies in European art, and hence towards the reflections of such currents in local environment (primarily the artwork exhibited in the Spring salon).¹⁵ In that sense, certain segments of the complex structure of realist tendencies of 1920s would provide a firm and understandable foothold for Krleža's interpretations of future developments in Croatian art.

¹² "In its four-year existence, *Književna republika* had for the first time shown the readiness of the progressive intellectual elite to become consolidated in the ideological struggle with both open and concealed reactionary currents of cultural life." Translated from: Galjer, *Likovna kritika u Hrvatskoj 1868–1951*, 182–183.

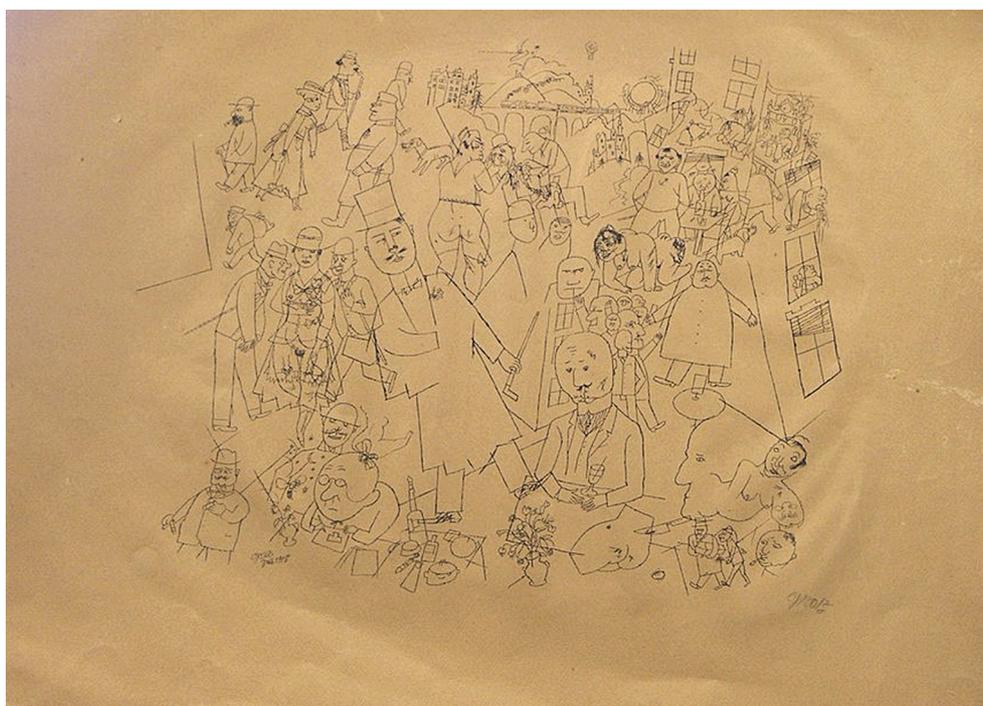
¹³ The possibility of Miroslav Krleža's authorship of the translation of Grosz's text published in *Književna republika* is suggested in: *Krležijana – Bibliografija Miroslava Krleže*, ed. Velimir Visković, Zagreb 1999, 60.

¹⁴ Miroslav Krleža, "O njemačkom slikaru Georgeu Groszu", in: *Jutarnji list*, 29 August 1926, 19–20. The text was published with minor alterations in *Književna republika* in 1927: Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", in: *Književna republika 2* (1927), 83–94.

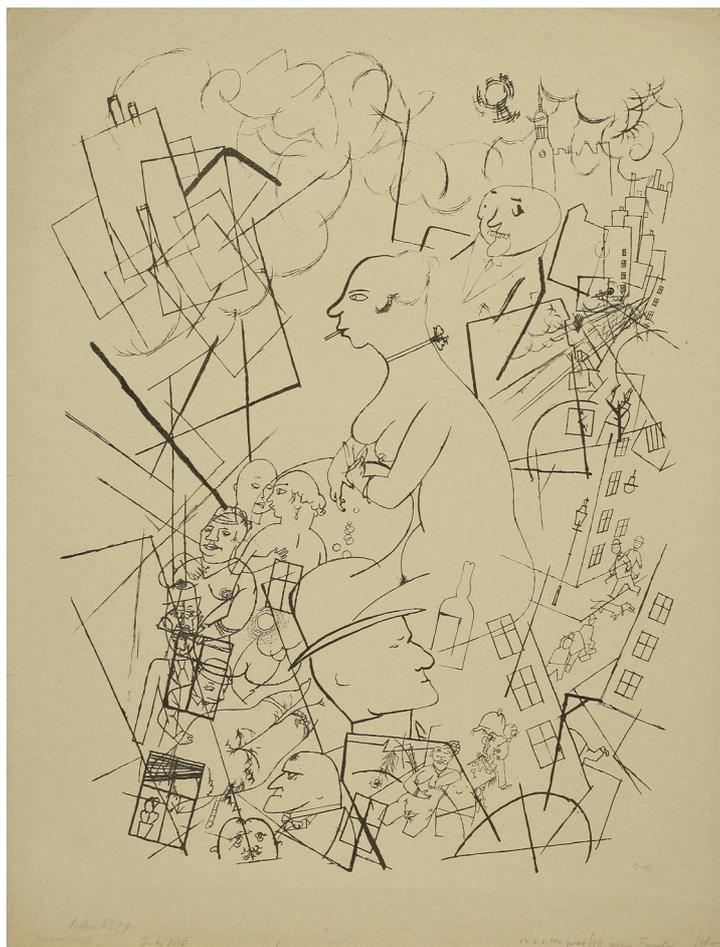
¹⁵ See for example: Miroslav Krleža, "VI. izložba Hrvatskog proletnog salona", in: *Plamen* 12 (1919), 244–247.



2 George Grosz, *Ecce Homo* (*Let Swim those who Can / Schwimme wer schwimmen kann*), 1919-20, lithograph / paper, 585 x 460 mm, Gallery of Fine Arts, Split, inv. no. 1534 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Photo: Gallery of Fine Arts, Split)



3 George Grosz, *Bourgeois World / Bürgerliche Welt*, 1918, lithograph / paper, 500 x 680 mm, Gallery of Fine Arts, Split, inv. no. 1535 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Photo: Gallery of Fine Arts, Split)



4 George Grosz, *Eva, my Friend / Eva, meine Freundin*, 1918, lithograph / paper, 650 x 500 mm, National and University Library Print Collection, Zagreb, inv. no. GZGS 406 grosz 1 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Photo: Goran Vranić)

[6] In considering Krleža's above stated views on art – especially his attitude towards the avant-garde tendencies and the establishment of Croatian painting through the imaginary evolutional line from Josip Račić to Ljubo Babić and further on – Grosz, as an artist who made a significant contribution to European avant-garde, at first seems an unusual choice to impose upon the entire national artistic scene. However, a careful analysis brings forth the conclusion that the common ground of Grosz's and Krleža's opinions was still solid enough.¹⁶ For that reason, the possibility of transposition of certain of Grosz's views and elements of his visual language into Croatian art was relatively easy and desirable, especially in the moment when the influence of the left-wing fraction grew stronger on the cultural scene. In his text published in *Jutarnji list* and *Književna republika*, Krleža analyses and carefully describes Grosz's work, especially the artist's thematic and formal orientation and ideological position, and detects all the elements he

¹⁶ Aleksandar Flaker writes about Krleža's attitude towards Grosz and explains the circumstances of his encounter with Grosz's works exhibited at *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung* in 1924, stressing the conceptual and formal links between the two authors, also evident on discourse level. Flaker argues that the first part of Krleža's 1926 essay on Grosz is "a cumulative substitution of Grosz's painting through verbal means". Aleksandar Flaker, "Berlinski intermezzo Miroslava Krleže", in: *Revija 5* (1987), 432.

considered crucial to contemporary socially engaged art. The first and foremost is advocating the necessity of connecting art and the social situation in which it is produced. In other words, art is and must be a reflection of the state of the society.¹⁷ Secondly, in the context of Grosz's work Krleža also stresses the "tendency" in art as one of the key features of artistic creation.¹⁸ Furthermore, inspired by Grosz's opinions on the active role of the artist in society, the writer clearly states that the artist himself is the one to take "sides" in the contemporary "battle of the classes".¹⁹ Such attitude can certainly be interpreted as unambiguous criticism of art-for-art's-sake. Finally, he distinctly emphasises Grosz and his work as the best model for any "revolutionary" artistic orientation, both in ideological and formal sense.²⁰ Thus, three years prior to the foundation of the Association of Artists Zemlja Krleža wrote a kind of its "programme before programme" – he articulated the basic guidelines to be followed in the process of drawing up the Association's programme and manifesto several years later. The proposals considered to be the "ideological basis" of Zemlja Association's programme, proclaimed on 22 May 1929, mention the "struggle against art-for-art's-sake" and the demand that "art should reflect the milieu and correspond to contemporary vital needs". The programme's "practical basis" imposes the collaboration with ideologically similarly oriented groups.²¹ The text of Zemlja's manifesto was published on the cover of the Association's first exhibition catalogue and was probably written by their president, the architect Drago Ibler. It stated that "contemporary life is imbued with social ideas", that "the issues of the collective are dominant" and that "the artist cannot break free from the demands of the new society and stand outside the collective".²² This reveals the path of key concepts which starts with Grosz, continues with Krleža as the main initiator of the transmission of ideas, and ends with the Zemlja circle, especially Krsto Hegedušić. It can therefore be concluded that the protagonists of the Zemlja Association considered

¹⁷ "The meaning, the essence and history of art affirm that art is in constant and organic relationship (in its deep sense and in its essence), in constant contact with meaning and history of social relations." Translated from: Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", 93.

¹⁸ "All arts were tendentious. (...) Therefore a tendency in art is typical and it can in no way harm creativity. (...) When, out of principle, people reject a work of art for its tendency, they do not assume a critical position towards the said work of art, but towards the tendency advocated by that work of art." Translated from: Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", 93.

¹⁹ "Today there is an unquestionable battle of the classes, and when an artist remains indifferent towards it, when he assumes the so-called neutral position, he in fact is not neutral, but has taken the side of the stronger [class]." Translated from: Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", 93.

²⁰ "Georg Gros has taken the painterly stand through Dadaism, which promotes painting solely as another means of struggle, strives at the abolition of the so-called 'purely artistic' stand and at becoming the expression of the revolutionary tendency, not only in painterly, but also in social sense." Translated from: Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", 92.

²¹ The contents of the Zemlja Association's programme were repeatedly discussed by Krsto Hegedušić in contemporary periodicals, but the entire programme was first published forty years after the foundation of Zemlja by Josip Depolo, who retrieved the information from Hegedušić's archives. See Josip Depolo, "Zemlja 1929–1935", 38.

²² 1. *izložba Udruženja umjetnika Zemlja*, exh. cat., Zagreb 1929, without pagination.

relevant only one aspect of Krleža's ambivalent views on contemporary art; more precisely, the segment directly inspired by Grosz.²³



5 Krsto Hegedušić, *Snitch* (1933), published in: Krsto Hegedušić, *Podravina Motifs: 34 drawings*, Zagreb 1933, 55

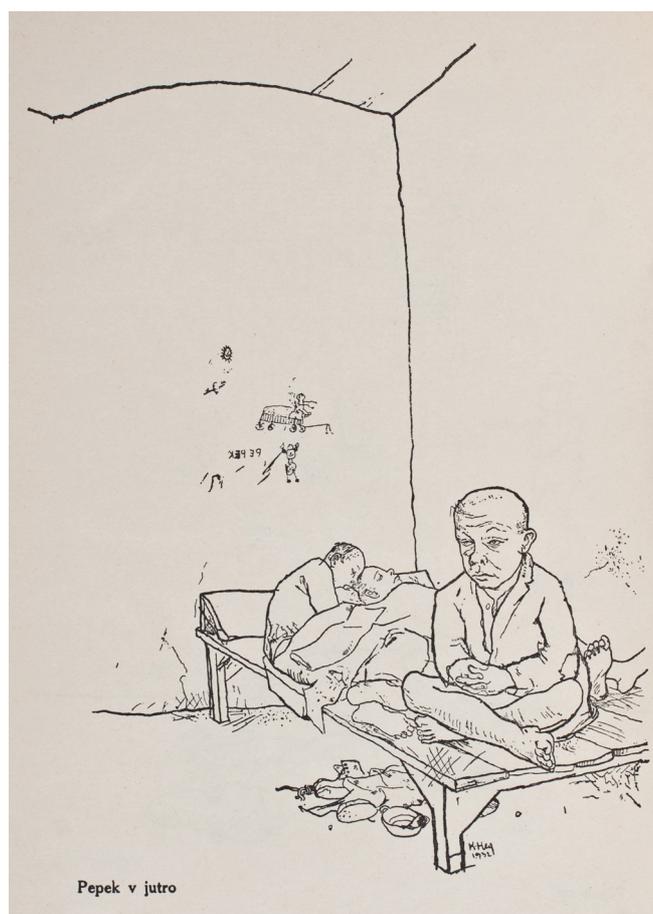
- [7] Grosz appears indirectly in Krleža's novel *The Return of Filip Latinovicz* (*Povratak Filipa Latinovicza*), in the inspired micro-analyses and references to works of art of the artists which the author himself, as did the members of the Zemlja Association, considered extremely relevant.²⁴ On the other hand, Grosz is given a more prominent position in Krleža's famous "Foreword" ("Predgovor") to the *Podravina Motifs* (*Podravski motivi*) by Krsto Hegedušić, published in 1933 (cf. figs. 5, 6, 7).²⁵ The foreword represents "the cardinal text of the entire clash on the literary left"²⁶ in which Krleža – contrary to the ever-growing demands for the negation of individual values and striving towards

²³ Members of the Zemlja Association could identify very few familiar and inciting examples for forming their own views on the aims of artistic production in Krleža's texts on painters Josip Račić, Ljubo Babić, Vladimir Becić and Petar Dobrović.

²⁴ Being the "keystone and crown of his engagement in problems of painting", this Krleža's novel also reveals traces of the writer's familiarity with Grosz's work and his writing about it. Tonko Maroević, "Slikarstvo Filipa Latinovicza", in: *Zbornik 3. programa Radio Zagreba 2* (1978), 260. Cf. Tonko Maroević, *Napisane slike. Likovna umjetnost u hrvatskoj književnosti od Moderne do Postmoderne*, Zagreb 2007, 172-202.

²⁵ Miroslav Krleža, "Predgovor", in: Krsto Hegedušić, *Podravski motivi: trideset i četiri crteža*, Zagreb 1933, 5-26.

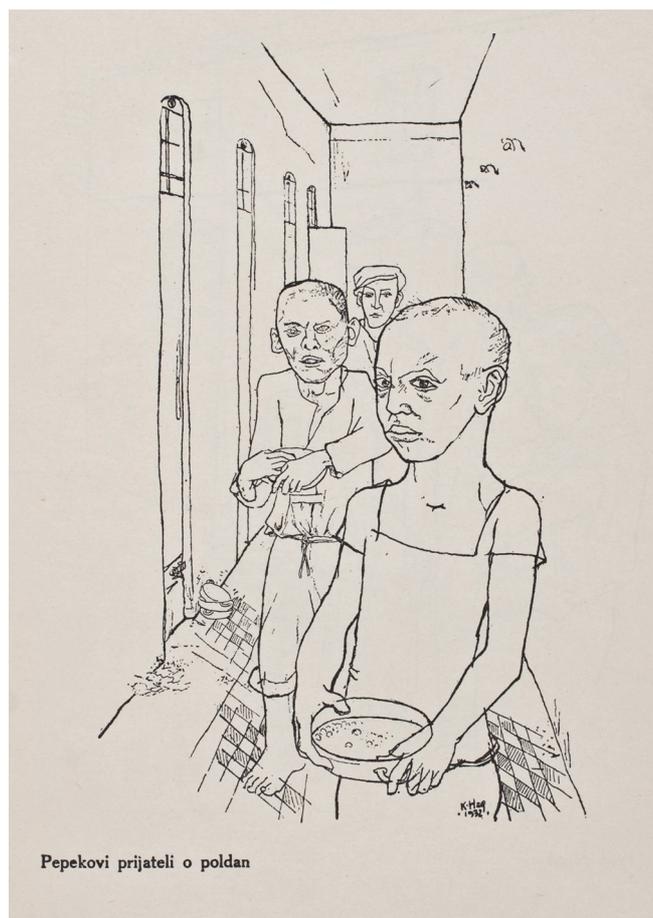
complete ideologization of art – advocates a critically oriented and socially engaged, but still independent art. In this context, Krleža stresses the values arising from the individual as the highest in any attempt of artistic creation. He certainly found the support for such views in Grosz's work. Introducing Brueghel, a painter fundamentally determined by the characteristics of the environment and society he reproduced in his paintings, Krleža mentions a similar attitude of Grosz towards contemporary Berlin. This finally led to the writer's crucial definition of Hegedušić's drawings: its connection to the society, people and local landscape. "Despite Brueghel's Flanders and George Grosz's degenerate Berlin" – wrote Krleža – "Hegedušić's painting remains local...".²⁷



6 Krsto Hegedušić, *Pepak in the Morning* (1932), published in: Krsto Hegedušić, *Podravina Motifs: 34 drawings*, Zagreb 1933, 58

²⁶ Stanko Lasić, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928–1952*, Zagreb 1970, 96. The "clash on the left" was an ideological conflict centred on the position and character of artistic production, influenced by the prevailing worldview and cultural politics in the USSR. That influence, due to the important position of the Communist Party in interwar Yugoslavia, was highly significant in political, social and cultural life. In that sense the crucial role was played by several factors: the conclusions of the Kharkov International conference of revolutionary writers (1930), the decision of the reorganization of literary and artistic organizations (1932) and Zhdanov's efforts to put art into exclusive service of the political goals of the Communist Party, and proclaim Socialist Realism the only acceptable form of artistic expression. The ways of understanding and interpretation of such decisions would cause dissent in Croatian art, further encouraged by Krleža's Foreword, which, according to Lasić, represents primarily "the defence of the individual".

²⁷ Miroslav Krleža, "Predgovor", 24.



7 Krsto Hegedušić, *Pepek's Friends at Noon Time* (1932), published in:
Krsto Hegedušić, *Podravina Motifs: 34 drawings*, Zagreb 1933, 59

- [8] Therefore, as indicated in certain parts of his earlier text on Grosz, the author of the *Foreword* insists upon the transposition of elements and meaning. Similarly, according to the correct observation of Božidar Gagro, "Grosz's landscape of the degenerate bourgeois society and confused urban ambiance becomes Krleža's landscape of the 'Pannonian mud'".²⁸ In other words, when considering the Podravina motifs, but also the entire Hegedušić's oeuvre produced in 1920s and 1930s, one can conclude the following: what Berlin represented for Grosz, Podravina represented for Hegedušić. Thus the city became the countryside, and the poor and the exploited working class of the metropolis of Weimar Germany became the poor and disempowered peasantry in Croatian part of interwar Yugoslavia. In that sense Grosz's influence can be considered significant for one of the key problems of Croatian artistic scene of the period: the role of art in the formation of national identity. Due to the aforementioned transposition Berlin – Podravina (i.e. Grosz – Krleža, Hegedušić, artists within the Zemlja Association), Grosz's work became a firm reference in the process of the articulation of ideas of an independent, national visual expression, which was one of the basic goals of Zemlja's programme.²⁹

²⁸ Božidar Gagro, "Zemlja naspram evropske umjetnosti između dva rata", 28.

²⁹ One of the important elements of the idea of a national visual expression, produced within the circle of the Association of Artists Zemlja, is the connection of ideological and national categories. The specific position of the Zemlja Association among similar groups in Yugoslavia, but also in

Finally, it must be pointed out that the "Foreword" included an important step forward: Grosz was mentioned not only in context of the position of art towards the social reality, but also as an artist who presented Hegedušić's possible model on a formal level.³⁰ Thus in one of his key texts of the period, which would have far-reaching consequences on the artistic and overall cultural scene, Krleža assigned an important role to Grosz by connecting his views and work with the artistic production of one of the most vital artistic personalities in interwar Croatia.

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[9] The attitude of Krsto Hegedušić towards Grosz's principal views and stylistic preferences can be discerned in the Croatian artist's key writings which explained the objectives of the Association of Artists Zemlja. The most important text in that respect is the one entitled "Problem of the Art of the Collective" ("Problem umjetnosti kolektiva"), published in *Almanah savremenih problema* in 1932.³¹ The author explicates the reasons of his opposition to art-for-art's-sake, in his opinion pertinent to the so-called bourgeois painting, and states the formal models and thematic foundations on which to build social art. Hegedušić cites the definition of contemporary art which "depends on the middle class and dies with it", as stated at the beginning of Grosz's text "Statt einer Biografie". This is the first time that Hegedušić speaks of bourgeois art as right-wing oriented and examines the characteristics of "left-wing art".³² His conclusions, supported by the results of his work with peasant painters in the Podravina village of Hlebine, bear similarities with one of Grosz's basic theses – that artistic production should have an active role in contemporary society. This view is reflected in Hegedušić's definition of the "art of the collective" as the one "contributing to the development of collective consciousness of the local peasantry", and the one that should be formed through "ideological purity" and "formal clarity".³³

[10] The entire Hegedušić's text was clearly conceived as a critique of the individual, identified with art-for-art's-sake, and a direct plead for "collective" values. Vladimir Crnković considers the "Problem of the Art of the Collective" crucial for determining the advent of

broader Central European area, can be explained precisely by the tendency of uniting the ideological and national goals. There was a desire to express the ideological level through the elaboration of the problems of the local environment, to bring the local to a national level, and finally to express the ideological as a part of the common national identity. On the influence of Grosz's work, as well as his ideological views in the context of the relationship between art and national identity, see Petar Prelog, *Slikarstvo Udruženja umjetnika Zemlja i nacionalni likovni izraz*, PhD diss., Zagreb 2006, 153-159.

³⁰ "The drawing method of Hegedušić's figures and physiognomies is at times eclectic, and these movements and postures of singular figures contain moments recalling many figural attitudes, from Italian and Nordic primitives, to the Dadaist absurdities of George Gross." Translated from: Miroslav Krleža, "Predgovor", 25.

³¹ Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem umjetnosti kolektiva", in: *Almanah savremenih problema*, Zagreb 1932, 78-82.

³² Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem umjetnosti kolektiva", 79.

³³ Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem umjetnosti kolektiva", 79.

Croatian naïve art and its characteristics, but denotes an essential contradiction in Hegedušić's promotion of the "collective" and rejection of the individual artistic values. He claims that these views reflect the "experience of the period's most contemporary, at the same time pronouncedly individual artistic theory and practice".³⁴ Grosz, along with other artists which Hegedušić saw as role-models (identifying intelligibility and "tendency" with the notion of "collectivism"), were distinct individuals. Thus Hegedušić's text clearly illustrates one of the fundamental contradictions of Zemlja's artistic strategy, which would be resolved in favour of the individual by Krleža's "Foreword". This resulted not only in a breach within the Association of Artists Zemlja, but also in a broader conflict within the Croatian cultural scene.

- [11] In considering the key contributions of Krsto Hegedušić to Croatian interwar art, which were closely connected to Grosz's opinions and artistic production, one should regard the text "Problem of Contemporary Graphic Art" ("Problem savremene grafike"), published in the magazine *Književnik* in 1931.³⁵ The importance of this text within Croatian cultural scene lies in the fact that it set ground for theoretical and critical consideration of graphic art as socially engaged medium. The article is dedicated to the exhibition of the works of Sergije Glumac, and its introductory part addresses the problem, i.e. the position of contemporary graphic art. Hegedušić expresses his views on the key elements and formal characteristics of the graphic medium, claiming that graphic art, due to the technique which conditions the visual form and its simplification, "is easily legible to eyes less cultivated",³⁶ or more understandable to "the collective". Apart from a few general remarks on graphic technique and its rise, the core of the text consists of the comparison of oil painting and prints. While oil painting represents the non-reproductive, expensive art of salons and ateliers, which "becomes ever more distant from the needs and dynamics of contemporary life", graphic art is cheap, available, easily reproduced and popularized. It can also "be a serious means in the struggle for human rights, if guided by the creative hand of an aware artist (Grosz, Masereel)", which is precisely where Hegedušić sees its future.³⁷

- [12] The above analysed Hegedušić's writings prove that artists of the Zemlja Association – despite ideological differences of opinion regarding the purpose of the work of art and the share of the individual in its creation – considered art an important "weapon for the promotion of new socio-political ideas".³⁸ In that sense graphic art was assigned a crucial role and it became the most prominent medium of socially engaged art. The interest for graphic art in 1920s grew simultaneously with the increasing awareness of the social role

³⁴ Vladimir Crnković, "Četvrto desetljeće 1931–1941", in: *Podravski zbornik* (1982), 99.

³⁵ Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem savremene grafike", in: *Književnik* 3 (1931), 130-131.

³⁶ Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem savremene grafike", 130.

³⁷ Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem savremene grafike", 130.

³⁸ Mišela Blanuša, "Socijalna grafika u Jugoslaviji", in: *Jedan vek grafike*, exh. cat., Beograd 2003, 31.

of art. A number of reasons contributed to its new and distinguished position – from the historical role of a medium which enabled the easiest and fastest spreading of various concepts, to its technical characteristics and availability. Due to the possibilities of reproduction in large editions as well as their portability, prints have over the centuries presented an extremely important communicative tool in the dissemination of ideas of most diverse provenance – from visual models and compositions to political ideas and religious beliefs. In addition, they frequently bore a distinct enlightening and utilitarian function. Artists became aware of these disseminative capabilities of a print, which, unlike the exclusive, unique and expensive technique of oil painting, presented itself as cheap and far more available to every social class. At the same time, the simplicity and two-dimensionality of graphic art determined by the character of the material itself (wood, linoleum), made its visual language and formal elements more familiar and understandable to "the collective" which the artists wanted to address.³⁹ In consequence, graphic art became the primary mode of expression for the critically-oriented artists of the interwar period, as well as an adequate alternative to bourgeois art. It became frequently discussed in contemporary media, especially after Grosz's 1932 exhibition in Zagreb which featured works such as *Ausgebotet* (fig. 1), *Ecce Homo (Schwimme wer schwimmen kann)* (fig. 2), *Bürgerliche Welt* (fig. 3), or *Eva, meine Freundin* (fig. 4). The effective presentation of the artist's graphic oeuvre was considered an important event "which will undoubtedly leave deep and beneficial marks on our [Croatian] still young artistic life".⁴⁰ Croatian artists found a reference point in Grosz's works and identified those qualities they themselves strived to achieve. In ideological sense they recognized his engagement and critical attitude and his sensibility towards the representation of the present moment; at the same time they appreciated the simplicity and intelligibility of his visual expression.⁴¹

- [13] Another significant text to be considered in discussing social art – besides Hegedušić's text on the "art of the collective" and Krleža's Foreword – is "Contemporary Social Graphic Art" ("Savremena socijalna grafika") written by the painter and graphic artist Vilim Svečnjak and published in the Belgrade-based magazine *Stožer* in 1935.⁴²

³⁹ Within the graphic production of the members of the Association of Artists Zemlja, the dominant technique of etching was soon replaced by woodcut and linocut. While the intaglio techniques allowed tonal variations, deep shadows and spatial illusion, the properties of the material in woodcut and linocut imposed simplification and conciseness ("the economy of details"), formal clarity, and two-dimensionality familiar to folk art.

⁴⁰ Ljubo Babić, "Izložba Georga Grosza", in: *Hrvatska revija* 5 (1932), 336.

⁴¹ "If one based their judgements on the influence contained in and exerted by Grosz's oeuvre to contemporary graphic art, that oeuvre should be granted primacy. Its appeal lays primarily in its actuality, its belligerence and fierce critical attitude. And yet, his every line, his every cut is simple, comprehensible and almost primitive. Full of content and full of perception." Translated from: Ljubo Babić, "Izložba Georga Grosza", 335.

⁴² Vilim Svečnjak, "Savremena socijalna grafika", in: *Stožer* 4 (1935), 8-14. Although the title suggests that Svečnjak addresses exclusively the graphic medium, the core of his text contains a more general discussion on the nature and role of the socially engaged work of art; apart from the

Svečnjak's definition of social art and the description of its characteristics reveal numerous similarities with Hegedušić's views stated in "Problem of the Art of the Collective", although it remains evident that the text was written after Krleža's "Foreword". In his characterization of the work of art and its independence, Svečnjak clearly defends the artistic form and talent, and argues against dilettantism in social art.⁴³ Svečnjak's definition of social art (as does Hegedušić's identification of the elements of "the art of the collective") emphasises the role of a work of art in the development of social awareness, which corresponds to Grosz's basic views. Thus the central problem of artistic creation shifted to the relationship between form and content, where new content demands new artistic form. A work of art should be a result of a deeply experienced condition of the artist who, like Grosz, comes from the people and is able to "express artistic aspirations, volitions and feelings of the people in an honest and artistic manner".⁴⁴ Thus Svečnjak advocates an art close to the social class whose "consciousness should be raised", an art characterized by "primitivism" of the form and drawing which is "clear, simple, pure in lines, knows neither rules nor perspectives or academically conceived proportions and shading".⁴⁵ Grosz is exemplified as an artist who implemented the experience of "the collective" into his artwork, despite his academic education. By copying and tracing street drawings by anonymous individuals, he adopted their visual syntax and connected it to his own avant-garde experience, thereby creating works of art close and understandable to "the masses" – exemplified, e.g., in works like *Ecce Homo (Schwimme wer schwimmen kann)* (fig. 2), *Bürgerliche Welt* (fig. 3), or *Eva, meine Freundin* (fig. 4).⁴⁶

* * *

- [14] The cultural life of Zagreb in the first half of 1930s was extremely dynamic, despite the crisis which affected every aspect of life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, primarily the economy and relations among the nations which formed it. The number of exhibitions organized in that period was particularly abundant; many of them were of international

title, he makes no mention of graphic art. The editorial note states that the text contains excerpts from a lecture of the same title, given in front of numerous visitors of the Belgrade Zemlja Association exhibition (February-March 1935).

⁴³ "... because our public has witnessed and still witnesses the discussions of the basic questions of artistic creation, questions which are long due to be resolved and by now clear to everyone. These discussions were instigated by a dangerous delusion, which has been and still is pondered upon, that it is enough to give social content to immediately make the work of art socially engaged. Artistic form has been underestimated and belittled, talent depreciated and denied its meaning; volition, the will itself, has been considered sufficient enough. Thus [...] appeared a new dilettantism, dilettantism in social art." Translated from: Vilim Svečnjak, "Savremena socijalna grafika", 12.

⁴⁴ Vilim Svečnjak, "Savremena socijalna grafika", 12.

⁴⁵ Vilim Svečnjak, "Savremena socijalna grafika", 13. Svečnjak uses these words to describe the creative production of "the masses".

⁴⁶ These issues were addressed by both Hegedušić and Svečnjak. See Krsto Hegedušić, "Problem umjetnosti kolektiva", 82; Vilim Svečnjak, "Savremena socijalna grafika", 13.

character,⁴⁷ and have later been proven relevant for the reception of foreign influences and familiarization of Croatian artists with contemporary artistic tendencies, especially those of left-wing orientation. In these years Zagreb exhibition-goers had the opportunity to visit – besides Grosz's – the representative solo exhibitions of prominent graphic artists Käthe Kollwitz and Frans Masereel. While Grosz's ideological standpoints were fairly known due to the texts published in *Radnička borba* and *Književna republika*, up to the early 1930s his works were present in Croatian cultural milieu only through critical articles and images published in left-wing oriented periodicals. In 1929 Grosz's work was positively reviewed by Oto Bihalji Merin in *Nova literatura*,⁴⁸ a Belgrade-based periodical active between 1928 and 1930. The review included reproductions of Grosz's works, along with images of the artwork of other protagonists of socially-oriented art (Kollwitz, Masereel and others). Thus through Bihalji Merin's influential and renowned periodical Grosz's work became known in "the entire Yugoslav area".⁴⁹ A more direct public presentation of his artistic production and the position he held in the corpus of German art followed with a representative group exhibition entitled *German Contemporary Visual Arts and Architecture (Nemačka savremena likovna umetnost i arhitektura)* held in Belgrade and Zagreb in 1931.⁵⁰ According to several critics who covered the exhibition in the media, Grosz was rather inadequately represented, despite the number of his works exhibited.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the group exhibition of the work of German artists laid solid foundations for the reception and more thorough presentation of Grosz's work, organized in Zagreb the following year.

⁴⁷ Especially important were the exhibitions of German artists – the group exhibition German Contemporary Visual Arts and Architecture in 1931, George Grosz and Max Pechstein (a section of the exhibition of the Group of Three) in 1932, and Käthe Kollwitz in 1936. An exhibition of the work of the Belgian artist Frans Masereel, one of the key role-models for Croatian socially engaged artists, was held in Zagreb in the same period (1934).

⁴⁸ Oto Bihalji Merin, "George Grosz", in: *Nova literatura* 3 (1929), 66-68.

⁴⁹ Aleksandar Flaker, "Berlinski intermezzo Miroslava Krleže", 432.

⁵⁰ The large representative group exhibition German Contemporary Visual Arts and Architecture was held in Belgrade in 1931 (Cvijeta Zuzorić Art Pavilion, 1-30 April) and Zagreb (Art Pavilion, 3-31 May). The exhibition gave an overview of different stylistic tendencies which marked German art over the preceding forty years, and for the first time in the Yugoslav area exhibited the works of numerous German artists. The exhibition included different artistic media (painting, sculpture, book and graphic design, ceramics, architecture), with artwork by around ninety artists – stylistically ranging from the Impressionists to Expressionists and exponents of the New Objectivity. It was organized by the German Art Association (*Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft*) from Berlin, and the curator and author of the foreword to the exhibition catalogue was Alfred Kuhn. Alfred Kuhn, "Nemačka savremena umetnost", in: *Nemačka savremena likovna umetnost i arhitektura*, exh. cat., Beograd-Zagreb 1931. Artists represented in the exhibition included Ernst Barlach, Lovis Corinth, Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, Erich Heckel, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Max Liebermann, Max Slevogt, as well as the authors who had solo exhibitions in Zagreb in 1930s (Käthe Kollwitz and Max Pechstein).

⁵¹ Mihajlo S. Petrov, "Izložba savremene nemačke umetnosti", in: *Stožer* 5 (1931), 153-155. ; Đuro Tiljak, "Povodom izložbe savremene njemačke umjetnosti", in: *Književnik* 7 (1931), 285-288. Grosz was represented with seven works, two of them reproduced in the exhibition catalogue – The Street and Portrait of the poet Max Hermann.

- [15] The solo exhibition of George Grosz's work was held in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb from 10th to 30th April 1932. As no other exhibition of a foreign artist before, it aroused extreme interest among the public and art critics, and was covered in local newspapers and periodicals by way of numerous articles and reviews. The exhibition was coordinated by the "organizing committee" consisting of the members of the Group of Three⁵² and the Association of Artists Zemlja, as well as a number of contemporary Croatian architects, writers, journalists and musicians.⁵³ Unfortunately there are no archival records which would permit the reconstruction of the correspondence with Grosz or the gallery which represented him. Furthermore, the organizers who themselves wrote about the exhibition (Babić, Miše) did not reveal the circumstances which led to its organization.⁵⁴
- [16] In that period, the above mentioned writer, art historian and publisher Oto Bihalji Merin actively collaborated with Krsto Hegedušić and Ljubo Babić, which suggests the possibility that the Grosz exhibition was organized through his intercession, due to his Berlin connections. During his studies in Berlin (1924–1927) Bihalji Merin played an active part in cultural and political life of the German capital: he participated in the left-wing student and labour movement, published texts in periodicals and collaborated with Georg Lukács on the magazine *Die Linkskurve*. He also made the acquaintance of numerous European intellectuals, met Herwarth Walden and maintained close contacts with Bertolt Brecht, John Heartfield and George Grosz. Prior to his departure for Germany Bihalji Merin spent a brief period of time in Zagreb in order to visit Krleža,⁵⁵ who himself travelled to Berlin in these years (1924 and 1925).⁵⁶ Upon his return to Belgrade, Bihalji Merin and his brother Pavle founded a publishing company Nolit and the magazine *Nova literatura*. Struggling to assure its existence in the repressive system marked by the January 6th Dictatorship, the periodical received formal support from many renowned European intellectuals, including George Grosz.⁵⁷ Thus the first issue of *Nova literatura* listed Grosz and Ljubo Babić among members of the "magazine's editorial board",⁵⁸ while Krsto Hegedušić's illustrations were frequently published in its various issues. The above stated arguments render plausible the possibility that Bihalji Merin presented the link which enabled or facilitated the organization of Grosz's exhibition.

⁵² Members of the Group of Three (Grupa trojice), active between 1930 and 1935, were the painters Ljubo Babić, Vladimir Becić and Jerolim Miše.

⁵³ *George Grosz – kolektivna izložba*, exh. cat., Zagreb 1932, without pagination.

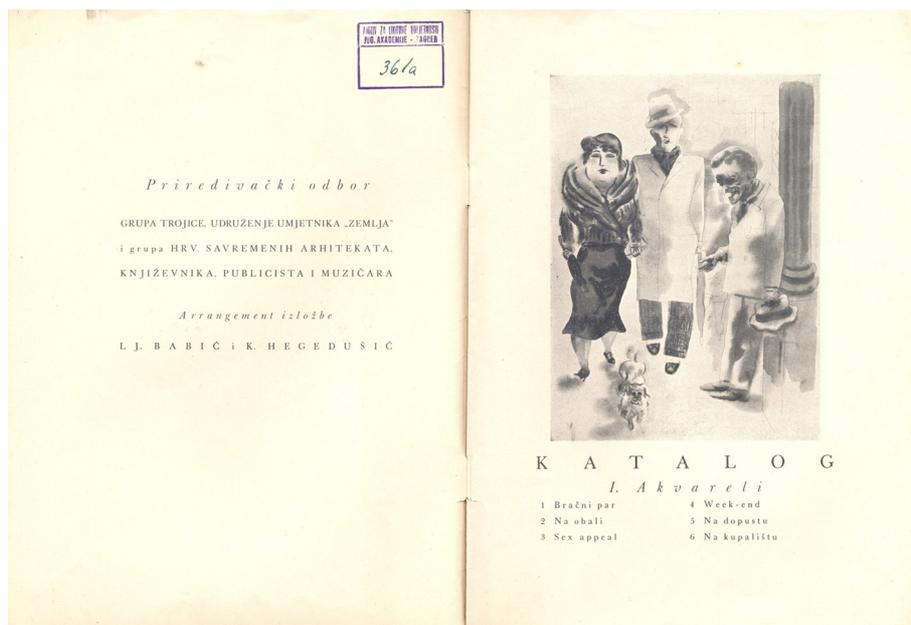
⁵⁴ In the first part of his text published in *Obzor*, Ljubo Babić mentions that the exhibition was prepared at the incentive of the organizing committee (The Group of Three and others), and that "with his great show in the Art Pavilion George Grosz is a guest of our artists". Ljubo Babić, "George Grosz", in: *Obzor*, 21 April 1932, 2.

⁵⁵ All information from: Oto Bihalji Merin, *Bio-bibliografija*, Beograd 1976, 15-16.

⁵⁶ Aleksandar Flaker, "Berlinski intermezzo Miroslava Krleže", 426.

⁵⁷ Oto Bihalji Merin, *Bio-bibliografija*, 16.

⁵⁸ Besides them the list mentioned K. Kollwitz, A. Cesarec, A. Einstein, S. N. Eisenstein, M. Gorki, B. Gavella, E. Piscator, U. Sinclair and many others. *Nova literatura*, 1 (1929), 3.



8 Catalogue of the Solo Exhibition of George Grosz, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Fine Arts Archives, Zagreb, inv. no. 361b (photo: Fine Arts Archives, Zagreb)



9 Grosz exhibition arrangement, photograph from *Jutarnji list* no. 7254, 13th April 1932, 8

- [17] Ljubo Babić and Krsto Hegedušić curated the Grosz Zagreb exhibition display, which exhibited 113 works divided in four sections – I. Watercolours, II. Drawings, III. Life studies, IV. Lithographs.⁵⁹ The accompanying catalogue (fig. 8) did not include the date of

⁵⁹ George Grosz – kolektivna izložba, without pagination.

creation of the exhibited works, but photographs of the exhibition (cf. fig. 9),⁶⁰ sold watercolours, prints and drawings⁶¹ as well as information from periodical publications suggest a retrospective character of the exhibition. Ljubo Babić defined the advantages of the exhibition in his two-part article published in *Obzor*. He claimed that the show, which displayed primarily recent watercolours and drawings, not only provided an insight into the artistic development of the foremost contemporary German graphic artist, but also represented "the first large solo display of Grosz's work abroad after the last year's exhibition in Paris".⁶²

[18] Grosz's Zagreb exhibition was discussed by both renowned critics and young art historians (Grgo Gamulin, Cvito Fisković),⁶³ and the reactions to the exhibition have been considered characteristic of "the general picture of the state of art criticism in Croatia in early 1930s".⁶⁴ The display of the works of the leading socially-oriented artist and one of the most important representatives of contemporary graphic art arose many questions among the art critics and became a platform for examining the role which art and artists should assume in society. It indirectly continued the discussion initiated by Krleža's 1926 text on Grosz, an issue (later defined as "the clash on the left") which culminated the following year with the publication of the *Podravina motifs*. The texts published at the time of the Grosz exhibition and in the following months reveal several critical standpoints, with the majority of authors addressing two aspects of Grosz's art – ideological and formal. While some critics focus on observing the formal qualities and give a stylistic analysis of the works, several authors see the text as a platform for the presentation and explication of the aims of social and engaged art. Although most

⁶⁰ The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives preserve a number of photographs of the exhibition (photographed by Foto Firšt). A photograph of one of the exhibition halls of the Art Pavilion accompanies an article published in *Jutarnji list*, which shows that Grosz's works were arranged in a horizontal frieze-like line (fig. 9). –, "Jedan sat u posjetima kod G. Grosza", in: *Jutarnji list*, 13 April 1932, 8.

⁶¹ After the exhibition Grosz's works were acquired by several museum institutions, and a number of works might have been sold to private collectors. The Print Collection of the National and University Library in Zagreb, the Modern Gallery in Zagreb and the Gallery of Fine Arts in Split preserve some of Grosz's works exhibited at the Zagreb exhibition. The inventory records of the National and University Library's Print Collection do not reveal the modes of accession of the five Grosz's works in the collection: drawings Night bar (GZAS 96 gro 1) and Study of a tree (GZAS 97 gro 2), watercolour Friends of Animals (GZAS 98 gro 3) and prints Eva, my friend (GZGS 406 grosz 1) and Dismissed (GZGS 407 grosz 2). It is interesting to note that the reverse sides of these works contain names and addresses of German galleries, previous owners of the works (for example Galerien Flechtheim). The collection of Modern Gallery in Zagreb includes Grosz's watercolour On the beach (MG-1240). The Gallery of Fine Arts in Split holds three Grosz's lithographs – The married couple (inv. n. 1533), Let swim those who can (inv. n. 1534) and Bourgeois world (inv. n. 1535), bought from Ljubo Babić immediately after the closing of the exhibition. Purchase information retrieved from inventory books of Gallery of Fine Arts in Split.

⁶² Ljubo Babić, "George Grosz", 2.

⁶³ Cvito Fisković, "George Grosz", in: *Novo doba*, 2 May 1932, 2; Grgo Gamulin, "George Grosz", in: *Signal* 2 (1932), 21-24.

⁶⁴ Jasna Galjer, Likovna kritika u Hrvatskoj 1868-1951, 228. For an overview of reviews related to the Grosz exhibition see also: Lovorka Magaš, "Recepcija Georga Grosza nakon zagrebačke izložbe u Umjetničkom paviljonu 1932. ", in: *Grafika* 10-11 (2006-2007), 48-53.

emphasise the aspects related to content, the difference between their views depends on the way they interpret the role of the artist, the connection between the individual and "the collective", i.e. between the content-related and visual aspect of Grosz's oeuvre. In this respect it should be pointed out that Grosz's above discussed position of a pronounced individual as well as his way of interpretation of the role of the artist in society were by no means one-sided. Grosz's discourse was subject to change, and assumed either a more moderate or a more radical attitude in defining the meaning of art in society. In the translated text published in *Radnička borba* he maintains a conciliatory stand, still granting some amount of significance to artistic experiments and atelier art, despite their lapse into "bourgeois nihilism". At the same time, he stresses the importance of socially relevant content, and encourages artists to assume an active position and to distance themselves from the middle class which created them. However, in his text "Statt einer Biografie", published in Croatian translation in *Književna republika*, he assumes a radical stand against the cult of personality, individualism and art aimed at pleasing the bourgeois taste. In addition, he clearly advocates the artists' engagement and their need to become active participants in the creation of new social relations as well as assist "the masses" in "the struggle against the rotten society".

- [19] In the context of the "clash on the left", especially revealing is the art critics' way of interpretation of Grosz's artistic development and their explication of the features of the visual language stemming from avant-garde experience – scene fragmentation, simultaneity and overlapping of different motifs, as well as creating dynamic, "chaotic" compositions which correspond to the images of urban life. Ljubo Babić assumes an affirmative position towards Grosz's art and remarks that his contents remain the same while the form mutates, concluding that Grosz uses the forms close to the avant-garde in order to accentuate his own expression. Babić points out that both the separation of the plane by way of lines and the entanglement of forms and figures in his work are not arranged rhythmically, or conventionally, but "their position is dictated by a psychological connection".⁶⁵ He makes special notice of Grosz's drawing skills and his studious approach, as well as numerous sketches and life drawings which precede the final, extremely concise realizations.⁶⁶ This "improvising quality", this sketchiness and velocity of Grosz's painterly ductus (criticized by "people with artistic prejudice") was defended by Jerolim Miše with the artist's basic education, his expressive directness and ability of abstraction.⁶⁷ Grosz is an artist who objectifies his instinct, and uses his talent in order to reveal the post-war psychosis which constitutes his main subject. The painter Đuro Tiljak,

⁶⁵ Ljubo Babić, "George Grosz", in: *Obzor*, 22 April 1932, 2-3. Babić mentions that Grosz's subjects reflect the work of Freud, Strindberg and Wedekind.

⁶⁶ Ljubo Babić, "Izložba Georga Grosza", 336.

⁶⁷ Miše points out that Grosz sacrifices "a large capital of craftsman experience, when there is a need to simply reveal the truth and use as little words as necessary". Jerolim Miše, "George Grosz", in: *Književni život* 3 (1932), 33.

unlike Babić and Miše, identifies the legacy of Expressionism and Dadaism as "painterly decadence of bourgeois society" and claims that it weakened Grosz's expression and made it overcrowded and alien to "proletarian realism".⁶⁸ Tiljak argues that any distance from object description which lacks a clearly stated purpose is an unwanted artistic arbitrariness. However, he defends and justifies such formal "deviations" with Grosz's former education and regards him the best example of an artist who rejected individualism in favour of "the collective".⁶⁹ In the context of the "clash on the left", such interpretations of Grosz's art reveal Tiljak's position of the greatest opponent of *L'art pour l'art*, which he assumed soon after the publication of Krleža's Foreword. A text published in *Književnik* included his negative view of art "out of time" which marginalizes the real content. At the same time, Tiljak's text in *Literatura* analyses Grosz's formal qualities through the prism of art understandable to "the masses", with a positive judgement of his technique of "tracing" the drawings of "the collective".⁷⁰ He argued that Grosz created a visual language with content and form close to the neglected social class, containing elements of "proletarian art" – two-dimensionality, simplification, lack of perspective as well as volume and proportion rendering, and rejection of the conventional aesthetic categories. Similarly to other critics, Tiljak employs the comparative method and juxtaposes Grosz to the graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz, whose oeuvre is also marked by social content and left-wing orientation. Even though there are profound differences in their respective approaches, Tiljak uses the comparison in order to stress Grosz's engagement, to accentuate his direct and unambiguous expression and to point out his prominent position in contemporary German graphic art.⁷¹ While Käthe Kollwitz still addresses the bourgeois milieu, appeals to its humanity and compassion, and remains alien to "the collective" in terms of form, Grosz prompts his public to think, accuses and "demands no mercy for his class, but only their rights".⁷² For Tiljak Grosz is neither a humorist nor a caricaturist, but a cold and cruel analyst whose works resemble chronicles of the life of the metropolis, drawn transcripts based on a great ability of synthesis.

[20] Grgo Gamulin saw Grosz's exhibition as an occasion to set the score with bourgeois art and art-for-art's-sake which he considered an escape, a reflection of a civilization in

⁶⁸ Đuro Tiljak, "Izložba Georga Grosza u Zagrebu", in: *Literatura* 5-6 (1932), 204.

⁶⁹ Tiljak puts special emphasis on the critical aspect of Grosz's art and the fact that he rejected the title of the artist: "We must restrain from explaining his personality through individualism. That would mean to falsify the basic motifs of his art and lessen his importance. It is known that Grosz generally renounces the title of the artist. It is his judgement of the individualist culture and art." Translated from: Đuro Tiljak, "George Grosz", in: *Književnik* 5 (1932), 162-163.

⁷⁰ In Grosz's oeuvre Tiljak recognized all those qualities of social/collective art noted by both Hegeđušić and Svečnjak.

⁷¹ Tiljak considers graphic art the only contemporary technique which "corresponds to the dynamics of life and the restlessness of machine production. It is an essential part of contemporary urbanity (...) Modern forms are legible through graphic means, through the parallelism and crossing of lines and the effects of simple geometrical surfaces." Translated from: Đuro Tiljak, "George Grosz", 163.

⁷² Đuro Tiljak, "Izložba Georga Grosza u Zagrebu", 205.

decay. He perceived Grosz as the conscientious artist who reacts to the current historical situation, one of the few who sacrificed the aesthetics to the truth, but still maintained artistic quality. In his opinion, Grosz dissects the middle-class and its milieu in an uncompromised, unsentimental and disdainful manner, and uses the simplified form in order to accentuate certain experiences to the extreme and strike a stronger and more precise blow. Apart from the ideological aspects and Grosz's artistic development, Gamulin and other critics addressed a wide array of subjects previously introduced to the discussion on Grosz by Miroslav Krleža. These range from the role and importance of the metropolis, grotesque and caricature motifs as key elements of the artist's oeuvre, to the comparisons with contemporary writers and famous artistic precursors, satirists and critics of social relations. In that respect, Gamulin places the German artist in line with great chroniclers and analysts such as Goya and Daumier, and interprets Grosz's position as "the last pessimist stage of a great art".⁷³

- [21] Grosz's works were also contextualized in the exhibition-related writings of Cvito Fisković and Slavko Batušić. Fisković affirms his views by citing the aforementioned translation of Grosz's text published in *Književna republika*, in which the artist advocates engagement and attacks art-for-art's-sake and art that caters to the tastes of the middle-class.⁷⁴ Batušić analyses Grosz's position on the far-left and recognizes him as the greatest critic of contemporary social order, who uses his "Röntgen eyes"⁷⁵ to document the facts and sees the true and genuine meaning of everything that happens. The author also stresses Grosz's "literary dimension", pointing out that the German artist does not paint, but writes a chronicle of the present world. Besides Batušić, there were other critics – including Krleža himself – who stressed Grosz's literary inclination, the narrative quality of his prints and watercolours with visual blades analogue to verbal methods of contemporary writers. Already in 1926 Krleža compared Grosz to writers and concluded that "Wedekind, and Strindberg and Karl Kraus [...] surgically dissect the surface and enter under the live flesh, but the anatomy of any of them (including the most extreme of all: Karl Kraus) is never so cruel and so terrifying as that of George Grosz".⁷⁶ In his text in *Novosti*, Josip Draganić called Grosz an exquisite draughtsman and "literate of the line", as well as "a realist in the manner of fiction" whose inspiration is not primarily visual but exceeds the painterly, it is contemplative and intellectual.⁷⁷ Despite his positive

⁷³ Gamulin pays special attention to the analysis of the relations and different positions of Grosz and Honoré Daumier. While Daumier remains the right-wing critic of the middle class, Grosz is "...a daumieresque figure projected to the final phase of bourgeoisie, he is the left-wing critic of middle-class society". Grgo Gamulin, "George Grosz", 21, 24.

⁷⁴ Cvito Fisković, "George Grosz", 2.

⁷⁵ Slavko Batušić, "George Grosz i lice današnjeg svijeta", in: *Vidik* 2 (1932), 51-52.

⁷⁶ Miroslav Krleža, "O nemačkom slikaru Georgu Grosu", 84.

⁷⁷ Draganić points out that Grosz "does not draw lines, but through drawing writes his thoughts and records his observations". Like Miše and Babić, he also stresses Grosz's ability to abstract, his precision and conciseness. Josip Draganić, "Izložba Georga Grosza", in: *Novosti*, 10 May 1932, 11.

review of the exhibition and the efforts to acquaint the general public with the work of a foreign artist, Draganić pointed to the inconsistencies in the structure of the organizing committee. While members of the Zemlja Association share a common formal and ideological ground with Grosz, members of the Group of Three and their "bourgeois painting" occupy an entirely different programmatic position. Ivo Franić also objected to the participation of the advocates of the *L'art pour l'art* in the organization of the exhibition. In his negative review of the show and the exhibited works, published in *Narodne novine*, he criticized Grosz as one of "the most bitter Communist-inclined ideologists and propagators in the field of artistic expression".⁷⁸ Franić's criticism, formulated in terms of ideology and formal elements, was directed equally to the members of the *Zemlja Association* and the *Group of Three*. He objected to the fact that the advocates of "our [national visual] expression" had organized an exhibition of an international artist who, in his opinion, shared no common ground with Croatian art. He gives a one-sided interpretation of Grosz's art as purely tendentious and ideological, and points out that "Grosz openly dismisses the notion of art and subdues it to serve practical revolt, as a tool".⁷⁹ While other critics considered international exhibitions, including Grosz's, a desirable way of familiarizing with European art, Franić was the only one to assume a decisively negative attitude.

[22] Grosz's exhibition in Zagreb encouraged numerous questions which reach far beyond the artistic and extend to the area of social and political activity. Most critics gave positive reviews of the exhibition, considering it an important event with far-reaching consequences to Croatian artistic and cultural life. The artistic personality of George Grosz was the one to offer Croatian artists a model for critically-oriented art which openly reveals both sides of the bourgeois society, with all its moral anomalies.

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[23] The work and standpoints of George Grosz exerted a crucial influence to Croatian art of the interwar period, and a key role in their promotion was played by Miroslav Krleža. By setting the foundations for the interpretation of Grosz's work, Krleža made a significant contribution to the creation of an overall cultural atmosphere in Croatia, and brought into spotlight the issue of the relationship between art and society. The members of the Association of Artists Zemlja, led by Krsto Hegedušić, recognized Grosz's theses and Krleža's interpretations as sources of inspiration on both formal and ideological level. Grosz's influence in late 1920s and early 1930s can therefore be discerned in similar political views, ways of defining social ("collective") art, in advocating an active role of artists in society, as well as in the issue of the extent and importance of the individual in the creation of a work of art. Grosz's 1932 exhibition in Zagreb facilitated the rise of

⁷⁸ Ivo Franić, "Kolektivna izložba Georg-a Grosza", in: *Narodne novine*, 26 April 1932, 4.

⁷⁹ Ivo Franić, "Kolektivna izložba Georg-a Grosza", 4.

graphic art as a key medium of social art, and Grosz's inclination to "the primitive" presented itself as an adequate formal model for Croatian artists. Furthermore, numerous exhibition reviews became a platform for questioning formal and ideological characteristics of contemporary art, which reopened the issue of "the clash on the left" through confrontations of different opinions and concepts. As no other foreign artist, Grosz became an integral part of all relevant issues and problems of Croatian art of the period, and a key link to vital currents of contemporary European art.

Translation Tanja Trška Miklošić

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