

FRANTIŠEK KUPKA (23. 9. 1871 Opočno – 24. 6. 1957 Puteaux, France)



František Kupka was born on the September 23 1871 in Opočno, a town in northeastern Bohemia. He grew up in nearby Dobruška, where he also went to school and later apprenticed as a saddle-maker. Because Kupka was a talented draftsman, his teacher recommended him for study at art school. From 1888 to 1891 Kupka studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, and for another four years he attended the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. In 1895 he moved to Paris, where he made his living as a painter and illustrator, and in 1906 he and his French wife Eugenie settled in the Parisian suburbs. The village of Puteaux became his home for the rest of his life.

In his artistic production, Kupka was possibly the first to dedicate himself to the painting of abstract pictures (those which do not depict any kind of definite subject or figure). During the painting of these pictures he was inspired by listening to music, and he also relied on a physical theory of colors. The artistic movement inspired by music and poetry is known as Orphism, and František Kupka is one of the most important representatives of this group.

At the beginning of the First World War, Kupka entered the French Foreign Legion as a volunteer. Shortly afterwards, however, he was wounded in battle at the river Aisne in France and had to withdraw from active fighting. He returned to Paris and there devoted himself to organizational work, when for example he helped to form the Czech Legionnaires into new units after their return from Russia in 1918. In his artistic work for the legionnaires, he designed various proposals for uniforms, banners, decorations, postage stamps, and postcards. Thanks to his meritorious activities he was made an Officer of the Order of the Legion of Honor (the highest French order) and promoted to the rank of captain.

After the war, Kupka was named professor at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, although from this point forward he lived in France. He devoted himself to artistic production and participated in exhibitions throughout the entire world. He died in Paris on June 24, 1957. Today, František Kupka is considered to be one of the most important Czech artists of the 20th century.

Photograph: František Kupka, 12/4/1930. From: <http://www.langhans.cz/> [10/3/2015].

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