

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

František Kupka was born on the twenty-third of September in 1871 in Opočno in eastern Bohemia, the youngest of the five children of the notary clerk Václav Kupka and his wife Josefa. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Dobruška, where Kupka spent his childhood, received his elementary education, and afterwards apprenticed as a saddle-maker. At the same time he attended a public drafting office, where he showed his enormous talent, thanks to which he was recommended for study at an art school. In the years 1888–1891, he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He then attended the Viennese Academy of fine arts for another four years (1891–1895), where he specialized in historical painting (pictures of historical, religious, or mythological scenes). In the year 1895, Kupka left for France. There he worked as, among other things, an illustrator for satirical magazines. In 1900 in Paris he moved to the famous artists' quarter Montmartre, and frequently exhibited in regular shows of modern art (the so-called "salons"). In 1906, he departed to the suburbs of Paris with his life-partner Eugenie, to the village of Puteaux, where he lived out almost the whole rest of his life.

In his artistic production, Kupka gradually worked his way from realistic depictions to abstract painting. Three of Kupka's works – *Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colors* (first exhibited in 1912), *Amorpha: Warm Chromatic*, and *Vertical Planes III* – are considered to be among the very first abstract pictures in the history of painting. Initially, his abstract paintings always had some kind of concrete foundation – a physical theory of colors, study of movement, and music all served him as sources of inspiration. This artistic movement inspired by music and poetry is called Orphism (after Orpheus, the mythical poet and bard of antiquity), and František Kupka is one of its most important representatives.

Immediately after the start of the First World War, Kupka entered the French Foreign Legion as a volunteer, where he was a member of the Czech "Nazdar" company; yet already by 1914 he had been wounded at the First Battle of the Aisne. Due to his wound and other health problems, he had to be removed from active combat in 1915. Thenceforth he worked as an organizer of the Czechoslovak Legions in France – he was chairman and promoter of the so-called "Czechoslovak Colony" in Paris. After the arrival of the Czechoslovak Legionnaires from Russia (1918), he participated in the formation of the Czechoslovak regiments in France, and he returned with them to the battlefield. With respect to his wartime artistic activities, he applied himself to the design of uniforms, banners, decorations, postage stamps, and postcards

published in support of the Legions. 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, as a volunteer of the Czechoslovak Army he led an artistic workshop producing monuments to the independence movement in Prague and, among other things, he participated in a design contest for the coat-of-arms of the new Czechoslovak state.

In 1922, Kupka was named professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, though he lived henceforth in France, where he devoted himself to artistic production and participated in exhibitions throughout the entire world. He died on June 24, 1957 in the Paris suburb Puteaux, where he had spent the majority of his life. One year later, the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris organized the first large artist's solo exhibition (retrospective) of his work. Today, František Kupka is considered to be one of the most important Czech artists of the 20th century.

- **Sources:**

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HOROVÁ, Anděla. *Nová encyklopedie českého výtvarného umění*. Svazek 1. A–M. Praha: Academia, 1995. ISBN 80-200-0521-8.

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KUPKA, František a Helena MUSILOVÁ. *František Kupka: cesta k Amorfě: Kupkovy salony 1899 – 1913*. The National Gallery in Prague, 2012. ISBN 978-80-7035-511-4.

- **Monographs about František Kupka:**

KUPKA, František a Lenka JAKLOVÁ. *František Kupka: Čech – Francouz – Evropan*. Hradec Králové: Královéhradecký region, 2009. ISBN 978-80-260-0804-0.

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LAMAČ, Miroslav. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1984. The Little Gallery.

MACHAR, Josef Svatopluk. *Kupka*. Rudé květy, ed. 5, no. 2, 3, 4. Praha, 1905.

VACHTOVÁ, Ludmila. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1968.

- **Interesting Catalogs of Exhibitions organized in the Czech Republic:**

Výstava životního díla 1880-1946 k 75. narozeninám. The Association of artists Mánes, Prague. (The curator of exposition and the author of preface in catalogue is Kupka himself).

František Kupka 1971-1957. Valdštejnská jízdárna a Palác Kinských, from 22. March to 30. April 1968. The National Gallery in Prague.

František Kupka and Oto Gutfreund – Čeští dobrovolníci ve Francii za 1. světové války. Kampa Museum, The Fondation of Jana and Meda Mládkových.

František Kupka, Otto Gutfreund – Umění ve službách národa (1914–1918). Gallery of Modern Art in Hradec Králové, 20. September – 30. December 2012.

WHERE IS IT POSSIBLE TO SEE THE WORKS OF FRANTIŠEK KUPKA?

- **CZECH REPUBLIC**, Prague
 - The National Gallery in Prague
 - Kampa Museum
 - Zlatá husa (Golden Goose) Gallery

Hradec Králové, Gallery of Modern Art in Hradec Králové

Ostrava, Gallery of Fine Art in Ostrava

- **FRANCE**, Paris
 - Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou
 - Musée d'Orsay

Caen, Musée de Beaux-Arts de Caen

Marseille, Musée Cantini

Rennes, Musée de Beaux-Arts de Rennes

- **IRAN**

Teheran, Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art

- **ITALY**

Venezia, Peggy Guggenheim Collection

- **KANADA**

Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada

- **AUSTRIA**

Wien, Museum Moderner Kunst

- **GERMANY**

Bochum, Kunstmuseum Bochum

Mönchengladbach, Städtisches Museum Abteiberg

- **SPAIN**

Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Bilbao, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao

- **SWITZERLAND**

Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermitage

- **GREAT BRITAIN**

London, Tate Gallery

- **USA**

Washington D. C., National Gallery of Art

Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art

Huntington, Heckscher Museum of Art

Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

New York

- Museum of Modern Art
- Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
- New York Public Library

Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art