**“In the concept of Apotheosis, painting plays a substantial…role. I have staged the potential viewer to its sheer proximity, touch and direct physical perception.”**

**Jiří David in an interview with Jana Geržová**

Jana Geržová: It is known that as a starting point for the project for the Czech and Slovak Pavilion in Venice you have chosen a picture Apotheosis by Alfonz Mucha, which is the last of his great series of the Slavic epopee created between 1911 and 1926. You have chosen a painting, through which, as referred to in the pressed media, you reflect on “a whole range of relevant themes related to the historical, cultural and collective memory and the different understanding of the concepts of motherland and homeland”. In the interview for Denník N, you specified this choice further and emphasized, that you decided to use it because “it best shows a certain kind of manipulation as to how to create artificial narratives, artificial constructions, artificial nations, thoughts about motherland and homeland…” If we stay at the general level, we can say that you have used the chosen painting legitimately as a reflectional platform to open a debate on the current understanding of the concepts of motherland and homeland. However, if we go into details, your choice opens several questions: Why did you chose exactly Alfonz Mucha, whose ideological concept of the apotheosis of the Slavs, as well as the very language of the painting, had been, already at the time of its origin, considered an anachronism or even anomaly in terms of both the foundation of Czechoslovakia fulfilling its desire to become a sovereign state as well as from the viewpoint of the advent of modernism. In addition, Karel Srp, in his excellent analysis constituting part of the accompanying publication Apotheosis, talks about the work that had “an unequivocal objective, not an intellectual ideological program associated with a particular political party or movement,” while underlining, that Mucha conceived it “as a personal, patriotic task he set for himself; It was not a tone demanded or commissioned by anyone else”[[1]](#footnote-1) What was the meaning of critically defining yourself against something which did not represent any collective opinion, but only the authors’ and, what was already obsolete at the time of its origin? Or did you choose Mucha because you think that his understanding of motherland, nation or ethnicity, representing the national ideals of the second half of the 19th century, has, once again, returned to the discussion?

Jiří David: Maybe, I was most of all bewitched especially by the anachronism that you just mentioned, however, as a conscious, i.e. reflected by me, counterpole (with sharp elbows of self-irony) against the “truths” (of the Western European construct of art history) of contemporary art ... in addition, the artist as an individual, i.e. Mucha, although creating something without a social order (sometimes, however, an unwitting mention in a personal conversation is enough and everything may suddenly appear in a totally different context!) can suddenly initiate a broad, society-wide view, an idea that, over time, mostly transforms (even unintentionally) to ideology. Discussions, polemics about one’s own, national identity are and will again be crucial (unfortunately, fortunately?!?).

1. SRP, Karel: In a Common Dream. In: PŘIBÁŇ, Jiří, RUSNÁKOVÁ, Katarína: Apotheosis. Köln, Walther Köning 2015, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)