



## A PLEASURE IN CONTEXT THE ART COLLECTION OF DAGMAR MENEGHELLO ON PALMIŽANA By Tonko Maroević

The centuries-old estate of the Meneghello family is cherished and cultured as oasis and asylum, but it is the input of love and know-how, of a sense of obligation and sheer sweat that have turned a charming little wilderness into an area of rich, dense cultivation. Following the lifelong commitment and self-abnegating zeal of her husband, Toto Meneghello, the journalist, collector and gallery-owner Dagmar brought to Palmizana a series of new initiatives, and added to it with her own creative, artistic, pictorial dimension.

The need for paintings and sculptures first of all came to her in the loneliness of the winter months staying on the island, in the emptiness of the bare walls of the houses, in the desire to make up for the intense experience of all manifestations of creativity that were hers while she was still living in Zagreb. Keeping company in Palmizana with works of art, Dagmar Meneghello very soon started to keep company with the artists themselves, too, to invite them to her house, to put on exhibitions for them. In fact, at the island's events and ceremonies, she would invite many a sculptor and painter to exhibit, thus enabling them to develop their reputations. The generation in particular that made its name in the eighties found in Palmizana both cultured hospitality and patronage, and many of them made their returns with the most suitable gifts, the most intimately formed works in which they often endeavoured to interpret the light of the clime, the spirit of the setting, the enthusiasm of the surrounds – in a couple of words of the *genius loci*.

It was a lucky coincidence that the eighties were relatively relaxed, pluralist, had let their hair down. The trend of the new painting, the trans-avant-garde, hyper-mannerism set free the resources of instinctual expression, opened up the possibilities of the referential, iconic relation towards motif, gave free rein to primary or infantile (and certainly spontaneous, fresh, sometimes humorously playful) visions of the world. We need not think that the collector necessarily preferred the trendy form of expression, nor that the many painters or sculptors consciously kept up with the current or fashionable tendencies; rather, we will conclude that Dagmar was naturally most oriented towards youth, as a gage for the future, and that after her collection of established values she (logically) desired the challenge of the new and the less well known. Of course, many artists have never ceased to be young and new, or never even paid a scrap of attention to the swings of taste but in their style and expression always cherished the maximum of freedom.

When the visitor arrives in Palmizana today, he or she is at once immersed in a highly cultivated landscape, but also, everywhere, inside and out, surrounded by works of art. Even those that were created off-island, away from island inspirations, often have the mark of hedonism. Clearly and understandably, this is a matter of selection according to kindred spirit, a desire for concatenation and complementation. Even when the motifs are not sun and sea, cypresses and palms, there is the hint of brightness and cheerfulness of chromatics, or temperament of gesture. A special part of the collection is, with reason, devoted to eroticism, to a hymnic celebration of the body, a euphoric affirmation of the vital, the vehement power of the commitment to the power of life.

Pleasure invested or transposed into paintings and sculptures spreads by sheer empathy to the observers, the consumers, the visitors, but the milieu itself seems to put into, to transmit to, the artworks, something of its own ardour and energy. The pleasure is doubled in this context.

The Meneghello Collection affords a nice cross-section of contemporary Croatian creativity in the fine arts, particularly of anything with a maritime inspiration and a figurative or neo-figurative base. It goes from the canonised classics like Kulmer, Petlevski, Šebalj, Radovani, Lovrenčić, Reiser, Željko Hegedušić and Murtić, via some of the most buoyant and most highly regarded contemporaries such as Šutej, Lipovac, Lesiak, Kuduz, Radoičić, Trebotić, Kavurić-Kurtović (and she is both greatly represented, quantity-wise, and remarkable in quality, as well as special typologically, for the hedonism of existence in her work is oxymoronicly seasoned with pain and vulnerability) to some who were once the newest but are today well established painters, among whom there is a marked presence of the Hvar painters Kovačić, Bogdanić, Zea Fio, Drinković, as well as, appropriately selected, among many others, Švaljek and Kuliš, Vrkljan, Lapuh and Rončević, Trtovac and Bane Milenković... The openness of the collection, its redolence of the south and marine currents, of the layered deposits of civilisation and the flows of creativity, holds also promise of new encounters, and serious reasons for coming to Palmizana.