

THE MAGIC WORLD OF IVAN GENERALIĆ. Introduction by *Nebojša Tomašević*. Translated from the Italian by *John Shepley*. New York: Rizzoli, 1976 [Florence: Edizioni Zeta, 1975]. 223 pp. Color plates. \$27.50.

George Bernard Shaw once said that "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." Translated to the world of art this can be rephrased as: "He who can, creates. He who cannot, criticizes." The eagerness with which artists anticipate reviews is frequently surpassed only by their inability to comprehend what critics say. The gap that often exists between the two is accentuated by the status of critics who are considered judges of what is good and bad: they are in a position to tyrannize artists on the one hand and to impose their taste on an often unsuspecting art public on the other. Yet no one can deny the positive role of responsible art criticism, especially when it separates genuine artistic creations from gimmickry. The critic's function notwithstanding, there is a dire need to close the chasm that separates artists from the public. Communication can be achieved by opening channels which artists can use to explain their creations, to convey the messages they want. From the perspective of art history, a mode of communication would have the additional salutary effect of preserving artists' thoughts for critical analysis. It is precisely for these reasons that Nebojša Tomašević deserves to be congratulated. He states at the outset that "the purpose of this book is to present the life and times of . . . [Ivan Generalić] through his own words" (p. 20).

Born in 1914 in the village of Hlebine in the middle of the Podravina plain in Yugoslavia, Ivan Generalić is one of the foremost naïve painters of the day, even though he is relatively unknown in the United States. A question that has always tantalized people who are interested in this form of art is the extent to which naïve artists have received formal training in art. However naïve or unsophisticated their answers may often be, they are, nevertheless, the genuine expressions of their creators. Generalić answers this question as follows: "If I'd gone to school, I'd have learned to paint other things and in another way, but I don't know if that would have been any better. The best teacher is hard and steady work, with no letup, for the purpose of achieving something. I've had no need for other lessons, especially in painting" (p. 96).

We also learn from him why he paints his locally inspired subjects mainly on glass: "I changed to glass when I realized that with this technique I could obtain fresher colors and put in more details. Colors on glass are more beautiful, more luminous. Canvas somehow swallowed up my colors, made them look dull, and besides I couldn't show all the details I wanted. . . . Canvas is a very crude material, and I found it impossible to do all those finer points that make a naïve painting complete" (pp. 93-94). Color, for Generalić, is the chief vehicle for expressing his "thoughts and feelings" (p. 87). Colors "should speak of joy, pain, tenderness, or of sudden violence, strength, or death" (p. 88).

Generalić attributes his success as a painter to the fact that he has always remained true to his peasant roots, that is, he has never tried to become someone he is not. As far as naïve art in general is concerned, he believes that people are drawn to it "because they find it simple and understandable: a cow in the picture is a cow, and a horse looks only like a horse. . . . Maybe they also find it much more sincere than school painting. We look at the world with our eyes, and paint it as best we can and as we know how, without filling our minds with theories and vague concepts" (p. 96).

Although it cannot be denied that Generalić's recent artistic creations are good, this reviewer cannot share his belief that they have improved. In spite of the expression that he succeeded in endowing to the *Hlebine Mona Lisa* (1972)—entitling this

work to be put alongside some of his finest paintings, including, among others, *The Two Peacocks* (1967) and *The Stag's Wedding* (1959)—some of his more recent works are uneven insofar as they lack the details so characteristic of most of his earlier works. This unevenness is especially pronounced in his *Unicorn in the Woods* (1974).

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SYMPOSIA

CANADIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE VIII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SLAVISTS (ZAGREB-LJUBLJANA 1978): TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN SLAVIC LITERATURES, LINGUISTICS AND STYLISTICS. Edited by Z. Folejewski, E. Heier, G. Luckyj, and G. Schaarschmidt. Ottawa: Canadian Association of Slavists in cooperation with *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 1978. x, 194 pp. \$10.00, paper. (Available from *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 256 Paterson Hall, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6.)

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FORSCHUNGEN ZUR OSTEUROPÄISCHEN GESCHICHTE, vol. 25: WERNER PHILIPP ZUM 70. GEBURTSTAG. Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin, Historische Veröffentlichungen. Berlin and Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz in Kommission, 1978. 402 pp.

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