

SÁNDOR A. TÓTH

V P A T T A A T T A P



l'arte di tóth

It is the dream of every art lover to notice great art that has not been around much internationally. There is not a lot of correct information about Hungarian born artist Sándor A. Tóth (1904-1980) online; a website about his work is under construction. There are some articles and a book written about him, which disclose the oeuvre of an almost forgotten avantgarde artist.

A. Tóth was brought up in Hungary, in an artistic and intellectual milieu. He attended the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1928, spent some time in Berlin painting and studying the work of the Bauhaus, then travelled on to Paris in 1929. In the year of his arrival, he already exhibited at the Salon d'Automne. He stayed at his cousin Helen Sulyok's and her husband Géza Blattner's place. They were the initiators of avantgarde puppet theatre *Arc-en-Ciel* (1929-1940). A. Tóth became a central team member. They designed the 'manifestations' (as he called the performances), he drafted, carved and engineered his puppets and painted the placards. His expressive creativity and technical know-how made him an artist and artisan at the same time. He was also an entertainer with a great personality and a noble heart, a real team player too.

Arc-en-Ciel made its debut in 1929. The performance was a great surprise and a tremendous success due to the avantgarde puppets and plays, the experimentation in scenery and the pantomime played to new gramophone music. It was a whole artistic performance meant for a grown-up audience. They played with the concepts of space and body, experimented with new types of marionettes, different stages, new techniques of movement, rhythm, light, sound and the aesthetic that is born from it all. They crossed the boundaries of the artistic spaces of performance and puppetry of the time, creating *Gesamtkunst*. Highly praised by contemporary critics and well-known in the artistic circles of Montparnasse, their workshop itself included many avant-garde artists. Their enterprises were documented by their friend, photographer André Kertész. A. Tóth remained in Paris until 1932, then he got a teaching job in Hungary, but he kept working for the theatre and visiting Paris in the summers. In 1937, at the Paris World Exhibition Paul Valéry presented the ensemble of *Arc-en-Ciel* with a gold medal for their performance of *The Tragedy of Man* by Madách. Unfortunately, a lot of their material was lost in World War II.

It is remarkable how his puppet art and his painting are inseparable. "His style is alloyed from the clarity of cubism, the dynamics of futurism, and the spontaneity of expressionism, sometimes spiced by grotesque humour, which makes his work even more unique." (T. Konok) His sculptural one-figure series are uniquely significant in the Hungarian art of the period. The figures are in fact jauntily formed statuettes.

Between the two world wars he started depicting the life of working-class people, often revealing social injustice. He kept focusing on catching movement and expressing a state of mind or emotion. In his later work – figure or street-space-nature depiction – he kept his signature clean lines and emphasized contours. His drawings and graphic works have a particular lightness and excitement to them. They still create the sphere of wonderment. He also had an exceptional talent to capture character, not only likeness, in portraiture. His series of self-portraits, tens of them, give an unforgettable impression of a 20th century human path in history.

In Hungary, as a teacher of art, art history, descriptive geometry and six languages, A. Tóth set an example of cultivating the arts through his workshops, art studio and open multilingual library. He had a formative influence on many of his students who later became leading intellectuals of the opposition under communist rule. While he got hardly any artistic opportunity and was a

persona non grata set aside by the communist system, he kept working for the public good in his erudite and inspired way.

Some international acknowledgment arrived in 1969, when he was chosen as honorary member, and in 1972 as a board member of the *Union Internationale de la Marionnette*. The interest in his oeuvre was encouraged only long after his death, through the publication of the monograph by his son Dr Gábor Tóth, in 2000 in Hungarian and in 2001 in French. His work (as painter, puppeteer, graphic designer and pedagogue) was declared national cultural heritage of Hungary in 2011.

By now, some of his works found their places in museums and collections. The oeuvre of this versatile artist takes slowly its place in the pantheon of 20th century European art. In 1996, his work was exhibited at the Lincoln Center in New York with among others Miró, Craig, Picasso, Arp, Léger, Duchamp, Man Ray, Oskar Schlemmer, Calder, Klee. In 2010, in the Picasso Museum in Malaga, as part of *The Toys of the Avantgarde* show, his artworks were to be seen alongside André Kertész photos and furniture by Marcel Breuer.

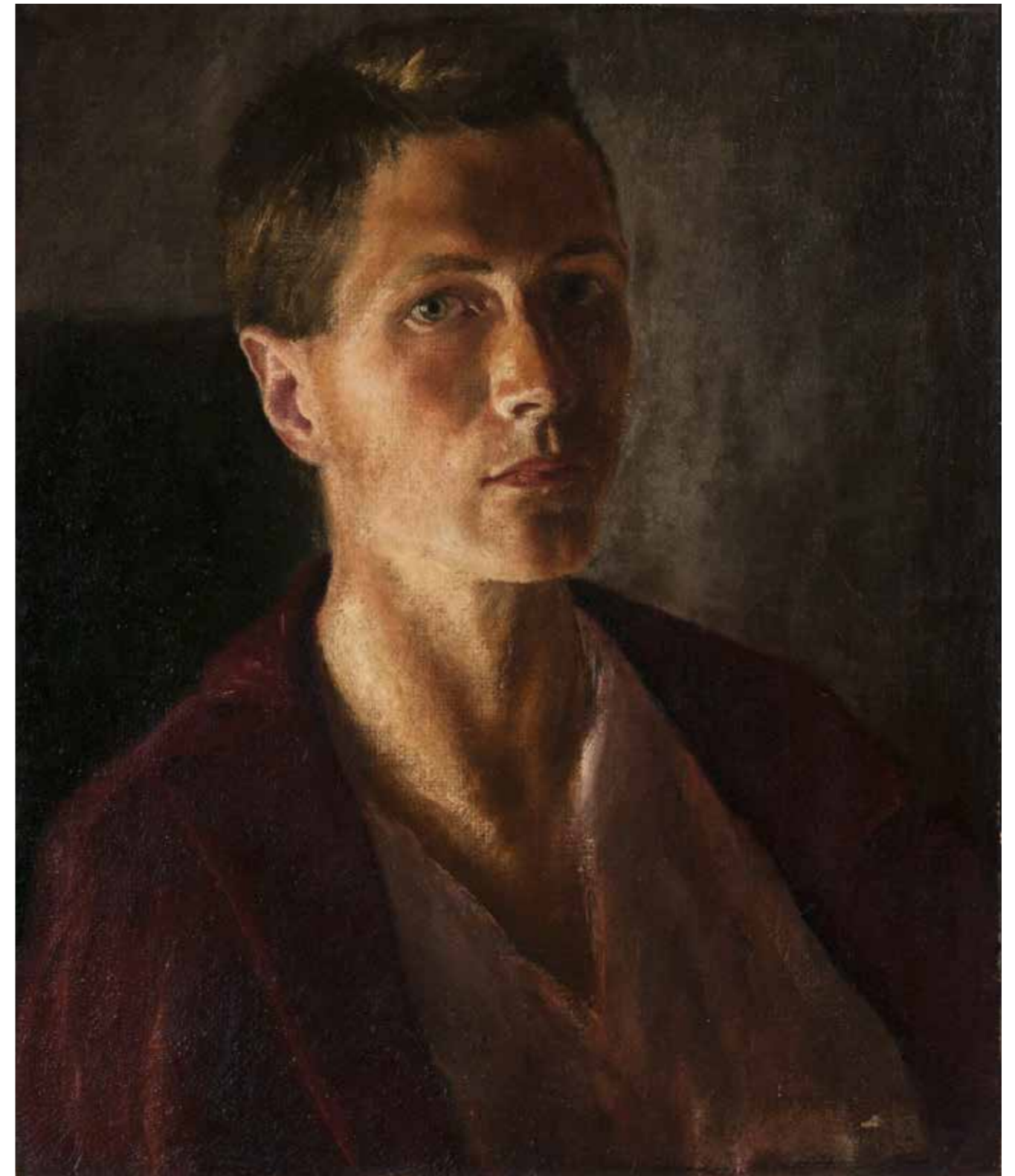
There is a certain resoluteness in his art, an authentic way of spectating the world. I am convinced that the power of it lies in his art of living. But how did the magic happen, how was he lifted to marvel at the world when times were so difficult? One can only look at the images and wonder: was the path hidden in the artist; is it still hidden in the art that is born?

Anikó Ouweneel-Tóth

Pour qui s'aventure à remonter l'histoire de la marionnette de création en France, c'est, aux côtés de Géza Blattner et du théâtre de l'Arc en Ciel, la figure de Sándor A. Tóth qui s'impose et incarne le renouveau de cet art en ce début de 20^e siècle.

Ce sont les « ombres blanches » aux courbes très graphiques des Parisiens, figurines en carton plat de *La rue* qui défilent au son du tout récent phonographe, et les marionnettes à fil d'inspiration cubiste de *La parade des soldats* (1934) ; les têtes de bois parfaitement sphériques des marionnettes à gaine des *Mains* (1931) et de la ravissante petite fille à fil de la *Toute Petite Maison* (1930), ou le démon de *La ruse du diable* (1944), au profil impeccable et redoutable ; ou encore la simplicité radicale des lignes de l'affiche de 1931 pour l'Arc en Ciel... À travers la pluralité des techniques marionnettiques et la diversité de ses activités théâtrales au sein de la compagnie – car il manipule, écrit et met en scène autant qu'il dessine et sculpte – toutes les contributions de Sándor A. Tóth concourent, par l'audace du geste, à l'inscription des arts de la marionnettes dans les avant-gardes esthétiques, autant qu'à la réinvention des ressorts dramaturgiques du spectacle. Il s'agit, pour lui comme pour les camarades de l'Arc en Ciel, de fonder un théâtre « entièrement nouveau », débarrassé de toute tentation naturaliste : mission réussie.

Aurélie Mouton-Rezzouk



▲ TIPCATTING (DETAIL)
Sándor A. Tóth
81x59 cm., oil on canvas, 1930-31

▲ SELF PORTRAIT
Sándor A. Tóth
30x21 cm., ink on paper, 1966

▲ SELF PORTRAIT
Sándor A. Tóth
55x46 cm., oil on canvas, 1925



◀ SAINT ELISABETH OF THE HOUSE OF ÁRPÁD
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 118x45 cm., 1937

◀ JUGGLER
 Sándor A. Tóth
 ink on paper, 65x31,5 cm., 1929

▶ MARIONNETTIST
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 120x59 cm., 1931





◀ RUSTIC MADONNA
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 70x65 cm., 1932

▶ I AM COLD
 (UNEMPLOYED)
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 79x44 cm., 1935

▼ STONECUTTER
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 85x68 cm., 1936

▼ PAPERBOY
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 80x63 cm., 1933

▼ SLEEPING LABOURER
 Sándor A. Tóth
 oil on canvas, 66x51 cm., 1930

▼ READING BOY
 Sándor A. Tóth
 aquarelle on paper, 45x35 cm., 1966





