

PRESS RELEASE

The National Gallery in Prague presents the visionary and outsider, Zdenek Rykr

It is rather difficult to define both the personality and oeuvre of Zdenek Rykr. On the one hand, there is the outsider isolated from the artistic community and, on the other hand, the pioneer and innovator in the field of graphic advertising. Rykr's free works move within a wide range of styles, oscillating between Expressionism and Cubism, as well as Neo-Classicism and Surrealism... Rykr was simultaneously of conservative and avant-garde nature in this sense. His works in the field of advertising are, on the contrary, rather unambiguous – modern and, for the period of their origination, visionary. Rykr, among other things, deserves merit for inventing the legendary visual identity and logo of the leading Czech Orion chocolate factory in the 1920s and 1930s. The National Gallery in Prague has cooperated with the Orion successor, the company Nestlé Česko, to introduce the wide public to the multifaceted oeuvre of the hitherto half-forgotten artist via the exhibition “Zdenek Rykr and the Chocolate Factory”. The exhibition will run from 27 May to 28 August 2016 in Trade Fair Palace in Prague.

The exhibition author, Vojtěch Lahoda, comments: “*The allure of Zdenek Rykr lies in his resignation to any particular artistic tendency as well as in his oscillation between free and commercial work. The 21-year-old student of art history and archaeology received an offer from an expanding chocolate factory, Orion. He subsequently worked for it to as late as 1939. He firmly opined that good and hi-quality advertising can cultivate the viewers' taste equally as the public space.*” Rykr in fact pre-determined the industrial design of the sweets, candies and chocolates produced by the Orion-Maršner (later Orion) company, also being the author of the legendary chocolate “star” and the packaging of the Kofila bar, which survived to our day with only minor alterations. He, however, was not only an excellent graphic artist: he also edited the magazine *The World of Chocolate* (Čokoládový svět) for the brand and, among other things, participated in presenting the sweets directly in shops.

“In 1921, the First Czech Joint-Stock Company of Factories Producing Oriental Sweets and Chocolate, until today known under the brand Orion, launched its cooperation with Rykr. The company thanks to him received prestigious awards at world exhibitions – for example in Barcelona in 1929, in Brussels in 1935, and in Paris a year later,” says Toren Emborg, CEO of Nestlé Česko. He adds: *“We are proud of our local heritage and of the fact that the products bearing the chocolate star are still at home in the Czech Republic. Our cooperation with Czech artists continues also today.”*

Zdenek Rykr also worked for other famed brands of his period, such as Čedok, Káva Kulík, Palaba Slaný, the German automobile company Horch, Dr. Zátka, Škoda, and Baťa. Besides that, he pursued free work – painting, drawing, and caricature – and was active as a journalist, partaking in the publication of the satirical magazine *Thorn* (Trn), writing newspaper columns and being the editor of the magazine *Home and World* (Dům a svět).

“In the area of free work, the exhibition focuses on Rykr's achievements in the context of Czech art – mainly on the selection of the essential moments which influenced the further development of the local art,” says Vojtěch Lahoda. As early as in 1921, as an autodidact and student, Rykr exhibited with the famous group The Obstinate (Tvrdošíjní) and, in the 1930s, exhibited at the Salon of the Super-Independent in Paris. In 1937, he significantly participated in the exhibition Spa Industry, held in the Czechoslovak Pavilion designed by

architect Jaromír Krejcar, at the Paris World Exhibition. The present exhibition moreover points out at Rykr's friendship with Jaromír Funke and at marginal Surrealists from the circle around Jindřich Chaloupecký, such as František Hudeček and František Janoušek.

An important role in Rykr's life and work was played by the frequent changes of his places of residence – his native Chotěboř was followed by Kolín, Chyš, Prague and Paris; he was also active in Spain. He constantly travelled, from Germany and Belgium to Greece and Rhodos. Railway formed yet another and very significant part in his life. Rykr was born at the Chotěboř railway station, lived at the Kolín railway station for some time and spent much time in the trains on the route Prague–Kolín and Prague–Paris. In 1934, he created the almost manifestation painting of a small and empty railway-station waiting room, entitled *Away!*, and named his 1934 exhibition after it. The artist's life ended voluntarily under the pressure of the Nazi occupation in 1940, under the train on the rails below Barrandov in Prague.

The exhibition organized by the National Gallery in Prague presents an extensive body of Rykr's paintings, sculptures, drawings and works executed in other media, as well as dozens of his graphic works and materials documenting his both professional and private life. His oeuvre was, however, subjected to sharp criticism during his lifetime even despite his many successes. Vojtěch Lahoda concludes: *"It is interesting to observe how Rykr's works were topical then and how they remain topical even today. I firmly believe that the exhibition will help realize the striking topicality of Rykr's expression, which was perceived as laboratory-experimental and incomprehensible during the time of its origination."*

BASIC INFORMATION

Date

27 May – 28 August 2016

Venue

The National Gallery in Prague – Trade Fair Palace

Author and Curator

Vojtěch Lahoda

Curator

Lenka Pastýřiková

In cooperation

Regional Museum in Kolín, CEKUS Chotěboř, City Museum, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences

Main partner of the exhibition

Nestlé

With the support of

The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic

General partner

Komerční banka

Exhibition partner

The National Film Archive

General media partner

Czech Television

Media partners of the exhibition

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Media partners

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CONTACT INFORMATION AND PICTURE MATERIAL

Press materials and pictures

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login: press

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