

Balancing
'Absolute
Painting' and
Reality: Ľudovít
Fulla and the
Paradoxes of
Slovak Modernism

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Katarína Bajcurová is curator of the Modern and Contemporary Art Collections at the Slovak National Gallery. Her chapter is a detailed study of the Slovak painter Ludovít Fulla, focussing on Fulla's work of the 1920s and 1930s and asserting his foundational place in Slovak art history. That claim is based on Fulla's pioneering role in the development of abstraction in Slovakia, in fostering a new approach—termed 'absolute painting'—that recognised the material reality of the picture and rejected three-dimensional illusion even as it retained figurative elements. Bajcurová examines Fulla's distinctive techniques and preoccupations, for instance his combination of clearly delineated forms with expressive fields of autonomous colour. She explores the various influences that shaped Fulla's aesthetic, including the artwork of children, the decorative qualities of regional folk art, mediaeval mural painting and religious icons. This text is excerpted from Bajcurová's monograph Ludovít Fulla, published in 2009.¹(JO)

Balancing 'Absolute Painting' and Reality: Ludovít Fulla and the Paradoxes of Slovak Modernism

A Painting Should Look Like a Painting

The years 1928 to 1939 are considered to be the pinnacle of interwar modern visual art in Slovakia, the period in which Slovak art caught up with modernist developments in Western Europe and avant-garde trends become concentrated around the School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava (ŠUR). In its ideas and pedagogical methods, the school was close to Germany's Bauhaus. The painter Ludovít Fulla was one of the crucial initiators and activating forces in this optimistic, albeit temporary, process of getting in step with Europe. As he later recalled, with a little irony, to all the younger prophets of the new art: 'there we were, chewing on our Oštiepok cheese and looking out at the world'.² The avant-garde reached Slovakia with a slight delay (in Europe and Russia it had started roughly a decade earlier), but, in spite of the typical lagging-behind that affected possibly every area of life in Slovakia, things were not so dramatic in this case, and the delay was made good. For Fulla, the time spent at the School of Arts and Crafts under the leadership of Josef Vydra was stimulating in every aspect; he was also full of energy and at the height of his creative powers.

Fulla's visual thinking at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s was shaped by a range of different inspirations of an artistic, but also an extra-artistic, nature. First and foremost these were inspirations that Fulla acquired and imported into his work while teaching at the School of Arts and Crafts. He readily found some affinities in the latest artistic currents and drew from those important works and ideas that flowed into the so-called 'crossroads of the avant-garde' that was Bratislava from the local environment, the Czech lands, or the more distant European context. Not only did these influences find their way into his own work—then heading towards its first experimental triumphs—but his intimate collaboration and discussions with his close friend Mikuláš Galanda, together with the rapid crystallisation of their personal artistic attitudes, also compelled them to try to formulate their theoretical understanding of the need to modernise artistic forms and their perception.

In 1930 a group of paintings appeared—*Summer Morning (Flowers)* (*Letné ráno (Kvetiny)*), *Balloons (Balóny)* (of which we know of two definitive variations and a gouache version) and *Toys (Hračky)* (with its lithographic copy)—in which, according to Radoslav Matušítk, Fulla invokes Cubism's discovery of the analysis of forms and of a disruption of the closed body that transcends its deformation and presents a new concept of the relationship between the physical body and space. This is not, however, a strict Cubist investigation of form and space, but an attestation of new possibilities for composition on a surface ... he does not combine different perspectives on a single thing, but multiple things seen from various perspectives.³

Indeed, Fulla heretically defied Cubist dicta, meaning that his 'Cubicising' stylisation was not founded on mathematical or geometric calculations, but was more intuitive, phenomenal, and natural; it was not derived from rational analysis or the perspectival breakdown of forms into

their different profiles. Besides, it does not hurt to acknowledge that Cubism was, by then, past its prime in its Parisian centre and that other, completely different tendencies in modern art were making themselves felt. We could describe Fulla's creative method as a selective one: no matter how up-to-date or fashionable a particular aspect of modern artistic developments was, Fulla always noticed and selected what most suited his own temperament, his mentality, his innate tendencies as a painter, and he never mechanically copied or repeated some known and attested model or formula. From his Cubist-style compositions there bursts an undisguised sensuality; they emit a passionate exhilaration of the senses, a playfulness, an optimistic view of civilisation and an energy (an energy typical of urban life at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, the atmosphere of which was gradually filtering through into Bratislava too). One feels in them the scent of a brightly sunlit summer morning or the unstoppable rise of balloons as they rapidly escape into the sky (Fig. 8.1). They give the impression of a cheerful, joyous 'Cubism' that is miles away from what Cubism had sought to be, and was known to be, in Paris or in Prague (which was then following one small step behind Paris). These paintings are a particularly eloquent example of how Fulla, in his heretical and unorthodox way, was able to adapt foreign 'models'.

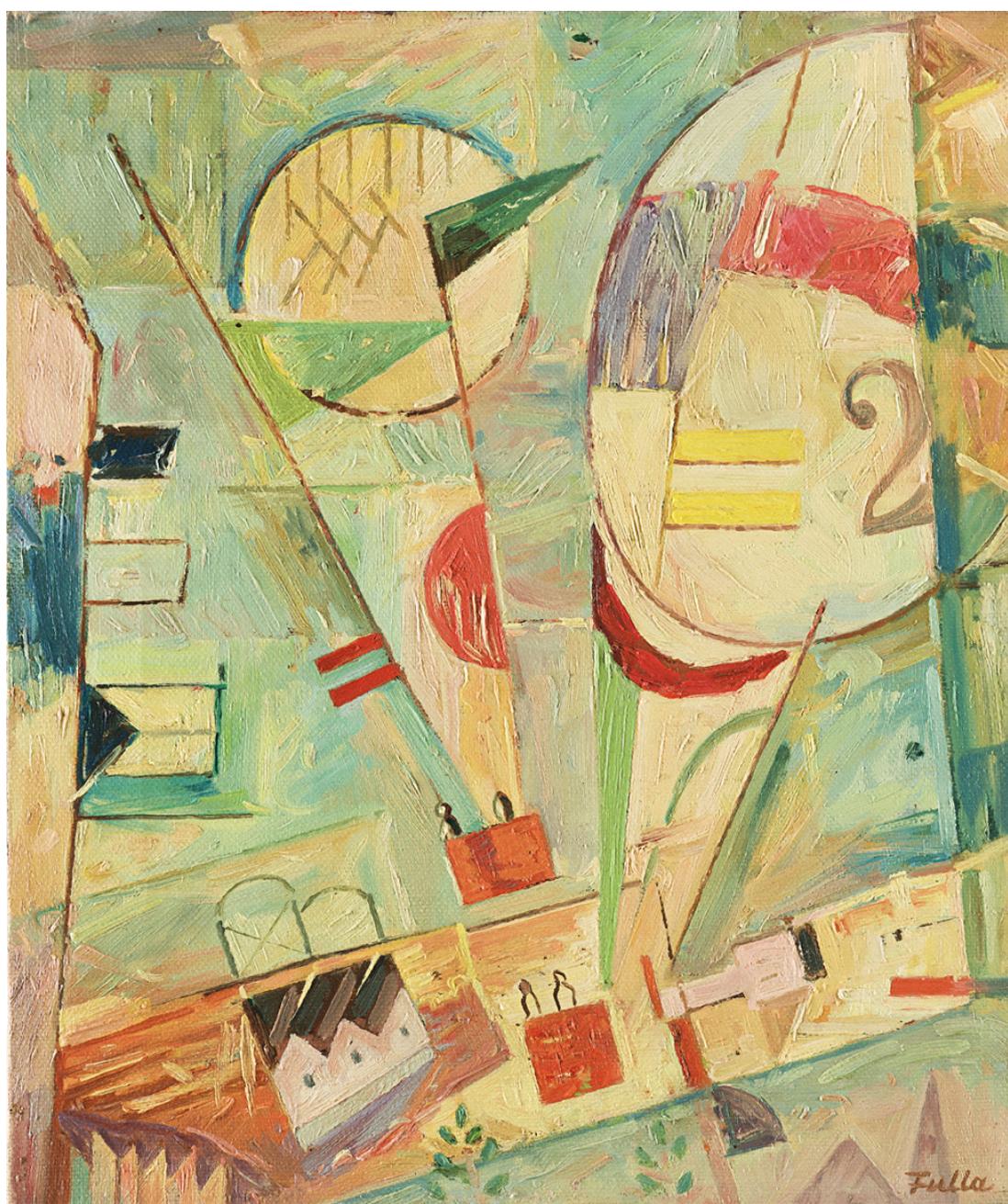


Fig. 8.1. Ludovít Fulla, *Balloons* (*Balóny*, 1930). Oil on canvas, 40 x 33.5 cm. Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

Another side of Fulla's work at the end of the 1920s was its distinctive manner of combining and fusing stylistic approaches inspired by folk or primitive art, the artistic expression of children, and medieval painting. These three areas had something fundamental in common, based in a shared vision and a tendency towards the abstraction of reality: common to all is a language of symbols, a 'conceptual' form of representation, a surface-based, non-spatial manner of depicting a subject, an absence of perspective, a frontal viewpoint, and the development of a theme through narrative deviations. Europe's artistic environment was at this time still charged with the electrifying force of the discovery of the new, unbounded, and spontaneous sensibilities of primitive, 'exotic' art as well as of children's expression.

Children's artistic expression resounded closely with Fulla's feelings at the time, his concern with 'the destruction of old forms in anticipation of a new, liberated expression'.⁴ Moreover, Fulla's turn towards 'the deliberate approximation of the artlessness and naivety of children's drawing' also had a practical context, linked to his pedagogical activity at the School of Arts and Crafts, where he worked directly with children in the painting department for the children's art courses (the Course for the Art of the Young), teaching flat colour drawing, montage, and pasting.⁵ It is very likely that Fulla made artful use of the childish material with which he was working and that he took inspiration from it. His artistic estate contains a series of child-like colour serigraphs (using a stencil), one of which, a picture of a twelve-year-old boy, was published in Fulla and Galanda's journal *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu* (*The Private Letters of Fulla and Galanda*).⁶ It is difficult now to judge how far the processes underlying such work were instinctive, subconscious; it is more plausible to conclude that he chose these sources of inspiration in a programmatic manner, on a highly-reasoned and rational basis. It suffices to recall Fulla's own words: 'these operations are conditioned by my emotional and rational disposition and attained with hard and conscious effort', even if, at the same time, he was stimulated by 'the pollen of childish naivety and its emotional vibrations'.⁷ Other creative methods of Fulla's that probably came out of his pedagogical practice include techniques of pictorial collage and montage, such as the pasting together of pieces of coloured paper, a technique often used in children's artistic exercises. For Iva Mojžišová, Fulla's 'colour-fields' (*farboplochy*) evoked 'pieces of stuck-on coloured paper', while 'the use of pre-drawn and cut-out stencils was a method Fulla would retain for the rest of his life'.⁸

The child or medieval artist—that is to say the primitive, unschooled artist—paints what he knows about the world, not what he sees: 'Fulla speaks not only of what he sees in things, but also of what he knows about them'.⁹ It should be added that Fulla also painted what he knew about art (including contemporary art), selecting from it those things that spoke to him personally. 'Drawings with childlike design', the elements of an intentional linear schematisation of the subject, are featured in paintings like *Children at the Sea* (*Deti pri mori*, 1929) and *May* (*Máj*, 1930), and in the lithograph *The Wizard* (*Čarodejník*, 1930).¹⁰ But the surface-based, frontal drawing style in these pictures resulted not only from Fulla's observations of children's artistic methods but also, and principally, from the adoption of an artistic 'elementarism'. This latter method was derived, it seems, not from any contemporary artistic trends, but rather from the basic approaches of artistic propaedeutics, or preliminary instruction. Somewhere around this point Fulla's future formal repertoire comes into being, comprised as this is of basic geometric shapes—circles, dots, lines, triangles, squares, rectangles—and of their various combinations. The pictorial composition of *May* is dominated by the triangular form of the Slovak May Tree, a decorated ritual tree used in rural areas to welcome the spring symbolically, and Fulla extends this geometric, sign-like basis of the composition with further sign-like motifs, incorporating, for instance, abstract ornamentation characteristic of folk embroidery or a row of schematically-rendered childlike figures. In *Suburbs* (*Predmestie*, 1929), reality is simplified and—as in the destroyed painting *Porch* (*Pavlač*, 1929) or the small-scale *Composition (Angel)* (*Kompozícia (Anjel)*, 1930)—broken down into an abstract web, a system of glowing, multi-coloured fragments. The figurative content of *Madonna with Angel* (*Madona s anjelom*, 1929) becomes a kind of pretext for its own analysis, its transposition into a system of circles, triangles, and diagonals. In all of these works, in which Fulla operates with a rational, schematically-constructed core, those drawn, linear,

Constructivist webs 'compete' with another element of equal weight: with colour, with an expressively moulded surface of thick, paste-like paint matter. This presentation of thesis and antithesis, this counter-positioning and connection of two essentially different expressive values, are the basis of Fulla's stylistic originality as a painter.

In another group of paintings, colour and paint matter take on an independent role: using sensory associations as his basis, Fulla developed a series of autonomous painterly scenes. While *Fishermen (Rybári)* and the newly civic-minded *Devín*—in which we notice an untraditional biplane and a Czechoslovak flag (with an inverted colour scheme) flying over a venerable national symbol—retain an 'empirical', if strongly painterly and stylised core, in *Memories of Venice (Spomienky na Benátky)* the radiant, luminous, coloured matter simply melts, dissolves, and flows like plasma. In *Circus (Cirkus)*, painted, like the other pictures here, in 1930, all that remain are sensual and affective traces of memories of reality. Tending towards abstract expression, this painting is an 'energetic' *féerie* of massed colours: 'while external forces do not disappear from his soul, the object sometimes does disappear, in order that his rich imagination may melt it down and his soul infuse it with music and rhythm'.¹¹

However, in the years around 1930, other paintings arose that were fundamentally quite different in conception: the Post-Impressionist *A Port in Marseilles (Prístav v Marseilles)* and the near-abstract *Suburbs* were both painted in the same year, 1929. They were produced together in a short time period, with Fulla working on each one alternately. They are proof of the fact that Fulla needed to search for, test out, and investigate various methods, and possibly that he was unable to decide which tendency to give preference to (more realistic methods would prove most successful socially). In *Kite (Drak)*, 1931 he combined two different approaches: a playful novelty of form, evocative of children's cut-outs or the parts of a construction set, is fused with the panorama of a realistic segment of landscape. In *Sunday Afternoon (Nedeľný popoludnie)*, 1931, we again find two distinct artistic approaches: a human figure, which retains an objective and somewhat heavy and burly physicality, and a playful, fanciful motif at the side. Here, however, an inversion occurs: in *Dragon*, the motif is central, but in this painting it is peripheral. Both these motifs—in the first case the main element, in the second an accompanying one—preceded the pictures themselves: they live an independent life in the colour lithographs *Kite* and *Moon (Mesiac)*, both 1930). This confirms the aforementioned fact that, for Fulla, small graphic forms were a natural field for experimentation, one in which he tended to operate more freely than when he stood before a canvas: he saw the painting as a definitive form, and his sense of the binding and serious nature of the completed work might be said at times to have bound his own hands. Other little gems radiate a similarly strong experimental spirit, for instance, *Still Life, Table (At Home) (Zátišie, Stôl (Doma))*, a preparatory study for the painting *Toys*, or *The Wizard*, subtle works of lithography that look like drawings. And this is in spite of the fact that their expression is wholly concentrated into a simple and clear line, capturing the crystal-clear form of objective systems. These were not simply 'minor studies'; Eva Šefčáková aptly described them as 'the first victorious arguments against empty bourgeois folklorism'.¹²

At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s the picture became, for Fulla, an independent composition of linear and colour elements, designated in *Súkromné listy* as 'line-forms' (*líniotvary*) and 'colour-fields' (*farboplochy*).¹³ We can apply these two neologisms more readily to Fulla's work than to Galanda's. They seem like an attempt to describe the phenomenal qualities of his work. The essence of their interrelation and dialogue had already been noted by Vladimír Wagner in the very first monograph on Fulla, when he spoke of a line that 'is, for [Fulla], an expression of the intellectual component of creation', and of a colour that is 'an expression of an emotional culture', by which means the artist 'split into two the meaning of line and colour as parts of a synthetic expression and gave to each an individual role'.¹⁴ Fulla's 'colour-fields' had an anti-illusionist, non-naturalistic character, and while they pursued elementary aspects of form, they exceeded the boundaries of their real-life models, filling the canvas with a field of pigment. Fulla considered these fields as 'living', not least because of his work with the coloured 'matter' of paint, this 'emotionally-defined coloured dough'.¹⁵ Light, as a function of colour, was suppressed to

a minimal role (in Fulla's work we only rarely find a field illuminated with light, and for this effect he would make do with white, yellow, bright ochre). He was not yet working with the structure of the colour field he would use later: from the 1940s onwards the colour gains a more varied internal dimension, it is broken up by touches, strokes of the paintbrush, blotches, spots and splatters, but for now the colour was mainly clean, warm, laid out across a surface and devoid of obsolete tints. Fulla's colour derives its decorative value and its symbolic function from this style.

The 'line-form' was not only a standard field delimited by a contour, an outline, mechanically enclosing a defined form coloured inside the lines. Radislav Matuščík, making reference to a statement of Fulla's on the matter, spoke rightly of the divergence between two kinds of drawing, the 'dimensional and the thematic', of their dynamic interweaving and their different functions.¹⁶ One of these two kinds rejected representation—it simplified and schematised the thing presented, at times disrupting and obscuring its character as object, and activating the silhouette form—while, conversely, the other kind constructed, defined, explained, and specified. Within the painting, both levels, that of colours and that of lines, were interlaced one through the other and they led apparently independent lives; though only apparently, because the ultimate effect of these paintings was founded precisely on the coexistence and interaction of colour and line. Oskár Čepan eloquently characterised this tension in Fulla's work, which, he argued, consisted 'in the unceasing contact, in the variants of relationship between two contrasting morphological sources: the object-based outline (the theme) and the autonomous colour-field'.¹⁷

Though we are accustomed to seeing Fulla as a high colourist, as an artist who expressed himself predominantly through colour, the genesis of the roles and relationships of his concepts of line and colour is a complicated issue. Once visual art became his profession, he needed to formulate his subjects first in line work, and yet beforehand, in his visual memory and his subconscious, he had probably seen these subjects in the form of colours.

In 1930, Fulla and Galanda decided to express their opinions on the modern picture not only in their artistic work but also in words. They formulated and, at their own expense, published that aforementioned manifesto of modern painting, *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*. Many of the themes and ideas that passed over from *Súkromné listy* into Fulla's work, and vice versa, have already been mentioned. But let us turn to more general questions and to the genesis of this peculiar theoretical document.¹⁸ The discussion surrounding the origins and degree of co-authorship behind this peculiar text has still not been satisfactorily resolved (and probably never will be, due to the insufficiency of sources). The text is a glossary of modernism, formulated in an incredibly extreme and exclusive way for Slovakia's cultural context, and to this day there has been no relevant, direct, or even indirect evidence to show that it was inspired by any other (foreign) text, even if several researchers presuppose that such a text exists. On the basis of critical and comparative analysis, such as has recently been conducted by Zora Rusinová, we might rather take the opinion that these 'private letters' represent a syncretic collection, a kind of compilation of foreign, transposed, preformulated (and simplified?) ideas.¹⁹ These reflections are precisely targeted, clumsy, and at times naive, but also eloquent and metaphorical. Fulla and Galanda fused several stimuli from the theory, practice, and rhetoric of the contemporaneous avant-gardes both in Europe in general (the Bauhaus circle and the De Stijl movement) and in the Czech lands (Devětsil, Poetism). They could have acquainted themselves with some of these stimuli during their studies in Prague, and with some others during their first years of activity at the School of Arts and Crafts, which by means of its chief organisers, pedagogues, and guests sought to raise awareness and maintain connections with current developments in Europe.

Yet it is perhaps more important to comprehend the social and artistic function and value of Fulla and Galanda's theoretical gesture, which, even if it ended too soon (they only published two issues and one double issue, all of which they financed themselves), was certainly not lacking in courage and daring. Their aim of founding 'some kind of tribune arising from a basis of uncompromising battle for new artistic directions, for new painting in general' was mainly directed against false bourgeois tastes, against a deeply conservative community of admirers of realistic art.²⁰ Even if the authors never really delivered their intended slap in the face to such

taste, the Slovak public vaguely registered their manifesto as 'an advertising label for fashionable style'²¹ and 'regarded them as *enfants terribles*, on the edge of madness', as Czech writer Zdeněk Hlaváček put it.²² Though they ran up against the underdeveloped condition of Slovakia's cultural 'foundations', this does not in any way reduce the magnitude and significance of their efforts. Fulla and Galanda brought a new understanding of the function of the work of art, emphasising its autonomous status, and were the first to reject Slovak art's traditional paradigm, emphasising national struggle and revival, and its forays into ideological and conceptual stylisation. And what of art as 'play and delight' (another bold phrase from *Súkromné listy*)? To paraphrase *Súkromné listy*, Fulla's pictures from the turn of the 1920s and 1930s look like 'a picture and not a section of landscape': they are a direct attack on visual illusion and were probably responding, in the strongest possible way, to the new tendency of 'absolute painting', which, in the language of that era, referred to abstraction or non-representational, non-objective art.²³

Beyond the Boundaries of the Object

Fulla attained a goal that no other artist in Slovakia had yet reached: he was the first to devise and paint an abstract picture. Though he would never abandon the horizon of the 'physical model', he programmatically applied the postulates of non-objectivity in the sphere of applied art. In stating this, however, it should be noted that the strict distinction between 'high' (fine) art and 'low' (applied) art had lost its prior validity within avant-garde circles. The whole surrounding world of objects could—and did—become the target of the independent artistic gesture, liberated from all conventions. Those disciplines that served humanity and sought to fulfil its needs, most notably architecture, became the representatives of a new understanding of art's place in society. A very important role was given to typography, as it was seen as a means to visualise and propagate new changes in civilisation and society in the most forceful way possible.

At the end of the 1920s, another significant aspect of Fulla's talent came to the fore: the universality of his thinking on art. This was a quality deeply bound up with the integrative aims of the avant-garde in general. In Fulla's case it comprised 'a capacity to think in intermedial terms and to define the priorities of one's own artistic orientation within other media'.²⁴ This consisted not only in his ability to fulfil various assignments wholeheartedly, from miniature signs to designs for monumental pictures, from typographical settings for books, magazines, posters, invitation cards, stage designs, and toys and ceramic experiments that, sadly, have not been preserved. What seems fundamental here is Fulla's capacity for artistically-autonomous thinking, for the creative transformation of the central elements of his then developing artistic style, elements he transposed to the various fields of his interests and activities. He was not only able to grasp and respect the internal laws of this or that discipline, its technical or 'artisanal' rules, but also to preserve a rare unity in artistic perspective and the principles of artistic conception.

Among the various fields that enthused Fulla at the turn of the decade, typography was number one. Its 'functional' aspect was not, initially, important to him. In the words of Iva Mojžišová:

For a certain time (particularly 1929) Fulla became so captivated by typography that even its practical uses acquired a deeper meaning for him. Alongside a Constructivist-style book cover and the first application of lower-case type in Slovakia for Ján Poničan's poetry collection *Demontáž* (1929), together with his designs for the magazines *Slovenská grafia* (*Slovak Graphic Art*) and *LUK (BOW)*, he produced non-applied typographical compositions and pictures, which today we know, and only partially, from reproductions. Fulla reached a place where no Slovak painter had ever previously set foot: abstraction. The picture *Rose and Hillside* (*Ruže a svah*), later to be hidden by another image painted over it, was described by Fulla himself as abstract. And likewise his unpreserved kinetic folding book, which he characterised as a Suprematist or typographical poem or as an abstract film. He got to show this at the *Sub-Tatras Exhibition* (*Podtatranská výstava*) in Spišská Nová Ves (1929), but was not able, as he had planned, to make printed reproductions.²⁵

Unfortunately, today we can only get some idea of Fulla's free Constructivist works hypothetically, on the basis of the reproductions that formed part of his typographical designs, notably for the magazine *Slovenská grafia* (1929–1931), in which his Constructivist compositions *Picture (Obraz)* and *Elementary Composition (Elementárna kompozícia)* (1929) were published. *Typographical Illustration – Dragon (Typografická ilustrácia – Dragon)*, 1929, from the same magazine, had a similar character. He included a 'functionless' Constructivist linocut in the first issue of *Súkromné listy* (it somewhat evoked a building, perhaps a house) and in the second issue and the concluding double issue he included further abstract compositions, which, typically, were untitled (these had a more 'organic' form, freely evoking a figure in the first case, a tree in the second). Iva Mojžišová described these planar, geometric and non-representational typographic compositions, montages, and illustrations as 'joyful' (drawing an analogy with his paintings of that period).²⁶ With these works Fulla crossed the proverbial Rubicon, as the first Slovak artist with the courage to go beyond the boundaries of the object and create a non-objective picture.

Fulla would have been able to acquaint himself with the new ideas and achievements of the Russian Constructivists, the Dutch De Stijl movement and the artists and teachers of Bauhaus—and with the application of their ideas to a wide range of manifestations and everyday objects—through the active international connections of the School of Arts and Crafts, where the principles of modern synthetic Functionalist typography, for instance, were not only promoted but directly incorporated into pedagogical and artistic practice. Fulla could thus have come across the work of German designer Jan Tschichold, the pioneer of modern typography, as well as that of László Moholy-Nagy or El Lissitzky. Tomáš Štrauss has also drawn attention to the possible inspiration of the Hungarian Activists' circle led by Lajos Kassák, which was mediated to Fulla by his student Ludovít Kudlák.²⁷ Yet Fulla had become interested in typography before starting to work at the School of Arts and Crafts, when he was still a student in Prague, a city whose atmosphere was at that time electrically charged with the infusion of new avant-garde currents, embodied in the Czech lands in the rise of Poetism, the activities of Devětsil and the figure of that movement's theoretical spokesperson Karel Teige. Through Galanda, Fulla made contact with the circle of leftist intellectuals grouped around the review *DAV (CROWD)*, who in their printing and design were the first to espouse the avant-garde principles of the new typography. In an unrealised cover design for *DAV* from 1924, Fulla used, for the first time, an emblematic sign of the typographic avant-garde, the diagonal. In 1925 he produced a clean and monumental design for a page devoted to Kassák. Over time he refined his typographic methods, later using techniques derived from the teaching methods at the School of Arts and Crafts, namely stencilling. Sometimes he supplemented his abstract compositions with objective drawing, as with his book covers for *For the Freedom of the Homeland (Za slobodu otčiny)* and *Hot Morning (Horúce ráno)* (1928) or in the poster for his and Galanda's own exhibition at the East Slovak Museum (Vychodoslovenské múzeum) in 1930, while a number '2' subsequently appeared in one version of his painting *Balloons (Balóny)*, 1930). His design for Poničan's collection *Demontáž* marked his first use of exclusively lower-case letters, one of the characteristic features of the new typography (Fig. 8.2). He also created a dynamic, lightly-rendered style of composition using the core components of elementarism, as he designated them in *Súkromné listy*: circle, dot, line and cross. By contrast, his cover for Jožo I. Biskupický's *Clerics (Klerici)*, 1931) comprised a set of rectangular forms.

Fulla's design for the magazine *Slovenská grafia*, as well as his visual conception for *Súkromné listy*, are usually considered the peak of his Constructivist typography.²⁸ In designing his covers, particular pages, advertisements, invitation cards, and illustrations Fulla employed all the innovations of Functionalism and Constructivism: perpendicular lines of script, the alternation of horizontals and verticals, and a dynamic composition formed through the use of diagonals. He gave 'rhythm' to the compositional field through varying sizes of letters, through their arrangement, configuration, aggregation, or through ordering them into regular grid structures, while using the simplest and most modern types of font possible, mainly grotesque fonts. Besides the use of script he 'rhythmised' his surfaces through arrangements of geometric forms, which arise through the repetition of dots, lines, and crosses. He created his own style, characterised by a certain quality

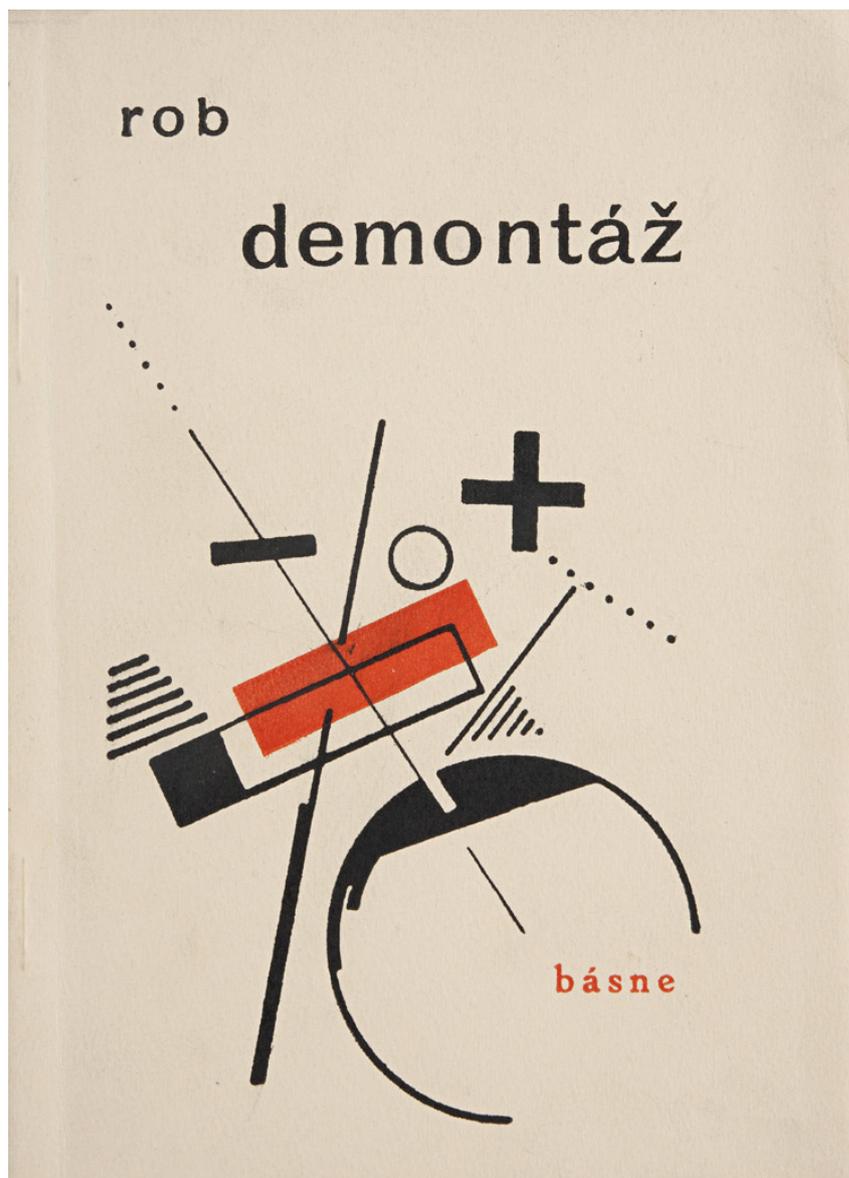


Fig. 8.2. Ludovít Fulla, *Jacket of Ján Rob Poničan's Dismantling* (*Obálka k Demontáži Jána Roba Poničana*, 1929). Paper, 21 x 13 cm. Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

of playfulness and decorativeness, still visible despite the overall moderation of the methods used. He preferred an 'artistic rendering' and his designs were described, in the spirit of that era, as 'typo-montages' or typographical poems. While he adopted Constructivism's traditional triad of colours—white, red, and black—he proved able to enrich it, incorporating yellow and blue accents into his typographical designs. Fulla created his own, personal version of Constructivist typography and worked with his models in an unorthodox and innovative manner, while preserving the clarity, transparency, and communicative power of the text. His use of minimalist, abstract, printed backgrounds beneath the text was considered an innovative act even in a wider, international context. Another typical method of the new typography—the combination of script, fields of colour and photography—was employed by a colleague at the School of Arts and Crafts, head of the typography department Zdeněk Rossmann, and also appeared in Fulla's work, although sporadically (for example, *Promotional Picture* (*Propagačný obraz*), in *Súkromné listy*, no. 2, 1930).

Fulla's fascination with typography was brief, and culminated between 1929 and 1931; his discoveries in this field were slightly ahead of those in his painting, as he pursued several different approaches simultaneously or in quick succession. In 1930, in the first issue of *Súkromné listy*, he and Galanda stated, paradoxically, that 'elementarism, the final stage in the development of painting, which has led through Cubism and Suprematism ... comes out of typographical elements, and it will possibly only continue to exist in typographical advertising and in commercial art. It will not remain part of the painting of pictures without further combinations'.²⁹



Fig. 8.3. Ludovít Fulla, *Blessing the Cattle* (*Požehnanie statku*, 1932). Oil on canvas, 90 x 110.3 cm. Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

Together they thus ‘restricted the radius of action for elementarism’ and Fulla eliminated the function of the abstract painting in his own work.³⁰ Painting for him now truly became the result of complex interactions and the painting began to ‘combine’ a very diverse range of stimuli. But this has already been discussed.

Yet these were not wholly isolated spheres of interest, and several types of artistic stimulus penetrated from Fulla’s Functionalist typography into his well-known painting and graphic work. The ‘free’ artwork *Abstract Composition* (*Abstraktná kompozícia*, 1929–1930) is perhaps the sole preserved example of his ‘Constructivist’ attitudes expressed in painting, but even in this case Fulla was not entirely consistent: as though indicating his need to create some theme from this geometrical system of rectangles of colours and trapezoidal forms, the picture’s drawn elements add specifying details that refer to the concrete, objective forms of human dwellings. He created similar motifs in the aforementioned paintings *Suburbs* and *Porch* (1929) and in the small-scale *Composition* (*Angel*) (1930), but, typically for Fulla’s paintings from the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, in these cases the pictures’ Constructivist and geometric core could not withstand the blows of Fulla’s painterly temperament and the pressure of its emotionality. In the lithographs *Kite*, *In a Village Yard* (*Na dedinskom dvore*) and *Blessing of the Cattle* (*Požehnanie statku*) (both 1930), in the painted version of *Blessing of the Cattle*, and in the painting *Expulsion from Paradise* (*Vyhnanie z raja*, 1932), he used a different, iconic method to modify elements known from typography (Fig. 8.3). The diagonal compositional schemes are more chaotic, the coloured backgrounds of geometrised forms are changed in the paintings into seemingly independent fields of colour, while the abstract lines along the borders are composed of objective elements. Yet, with the aid of Fulla’s drawing, everything is arranged to ensure that the basic thematic subject is preserved and remains legible. In his typographical poems and montages Fulla may have radically disrupted the illusion of space and programmatically refused any subjective, stylistic trace of the artist’s hand, but in his painting he never pursued these principles to their natural endpoint, for that was simply not the artist’s aim. His approach was different: through his use of colour and his handling of the paintbrush, he always modelled the surface and substance of his paintings, even if in a non-illusory manner.

It was palpably clear that this type of 'non-objective' work did not receive an enthusiastic reception in conservative Slovakia. Though Fulla did exhibit his Constructivist and abstract compositions, for instance incorporating them into a selection of his works at a joint exhibition with Galanda at the East Slovak Museum in 1930, the response from the public's side was 'mildly' scornful and not without a degree of disrespect. For example, when carnival works by the teachers at the School of Arts and Crafts were auctioned off at a tombola, the students reportedly presented a picture by Fulla with the words: 'ladies and gentlemen, this here is suprematism! Have no fear, it is not a disease, suprematism is completely safe!'³¹

The Slovak Myth

The opportunity for a large-scale artistic synthesis, which could assess and reveal the significance of Fulla's search for 'the new reality of the picture' and for 'absolute painting', arose when he was given the task of decorating a reconstructed twelfth-century Romanesque chapel in Klížske Hradište near Topolčany. The opportunity came about at the suggestion of the State Section for the Protection of Monuments, which envisaged murals, the decoration of the wooden ceiling (Fulla recalled that he had completed a design for this, though it was not preserved) and of the chancel railings. In his basic concept for the redecoration he refused the idea of any pseudo-historical imitation and attempted to reinterpret the assignment in terms of modern methods. Unfortunately, for reasons that remain unknown, the assignment was never realised. The original designs have not been preserved, except for some fragments, but from these preparations three pictures emerged that are rightly considered the very pinnacle of Fulla's work, as well as the beginning of a decisive turn in his ideas.

While both *Blessing of the Cattle* and *Expulsion from Paradise* arose in the same year, 1932, they differ from one another in several respects. The compositional layout and linear stylisation for *Blessing of the Cattle* had been tested out in two of Fulla's colour lithographs: *In a Village Yard* and *Blessing of the Cattle*. In their conceptual character and very concise composition, in which Fulla put into practice his theory of line-forms and colour-fields, they most closely resemble two other colour lithographs, *Moon* and *Dragon* (1930), though at the iconographic level they differ through their choice of a traditionally Slovak, agrarian theme. Yet the depiction and handling of that theme is new and non-traditional. The starting point for *Blessing of the Cattle* was a lithograph of the same name depicting a good husbandman. The graphic work, just like the painting that derived from it, has two focal points in terms of its composition and ideas: on the right-hand side there is a kneeling couple, a husband and wife praying for a good harvest while turned towards a floating calf, framed by bands that vaguely suggest ribbons or the braided edges of folk fabrics, on the left-hand side. In the painting, too, Fulla utilised his method of large, colourful, geometric planar forms that are given precise definition and demarcation by a line-based, drawn structure.

A notably more mature composition is *Expulsion from Paradise*. Two basic expressive elements are here merged into a strange, indivisible unity in which the leading role is played by colour: a colour that in certain places shines out with a contrastive effect, but is elsewhere varnish-like, translucent, or soft and pastel-shaded. Atypical of Fulla's work at this point, this white-ochre colour fusion with its rosy tints probably resulted from the fact that the picture was supposed to be produced using the fresco technique. A male-female pair, with lowered heads, weighed down with the gravity of original sin, is seen retreating into the unknown. God's punishment is embodied in the image of a hovering archangel who holds a sword in his hand and, like the Adam and Eve figures, is formed out of rectangular, triangular, and circular shapes. These resemble children's jigsaw puzzles and scrapbooks, montages of coloured cut-out paper, things by which the artist was apparently inspired at the time. Fulla took a traditional, Old Testament story and reembodyed it in a remarkable and original visual form, which, strangely enough, does not function in a tragic fashion at all. Fulla achieves his harmonic, compositional, and colour effects here without any kind of literary reference; rather these are defined by the internally concentrated force of the painter's artistic conviction. One further connection emerges, almost unwittingly, upon looking at this picture and its characters as they float in some kind of delicate pastel mist. Several years before the



Fig. 8.4. Eudovít Fulla, *Song and Labour* (*Pieseň a práca*, 1934–1935). Oil on canvas, 165 x 200.5 cm. Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

painter properly began working on it, he had given the following response to Ján Kostra's question as to who, among painters, was his 'darling': 'Giotto... Giotto—from across the centuries'.³² With the distance of time Fulla himself came to consider *Expulsion from Paradise* as the starting point of his artistic creed: in his own personal rankings this picture was followed by *Blessing of the Cattle* and *Song and Labour*.

During 1934 and 1935, Fulla produced the pivotal and most expansive painting of his *Song and Labour* cycle (Fig. 8.4). Probably Fulla's most famous painting, it is considered by many art historians as one of the artist's masterpieces, a national hymn about the nation and its landscape. Fulla received well-deserved recognition for this mythic parable of the life and work of the Slovak people, in the form of the Grand Prix at the Paris International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life (Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne), 1937.³³ Here he attempted, for the first time, to fuse, within a single pictorial field, his advances to date in modern painting with traditional elements, derived this time from mediaeval painting. He dissected the picture field into three longitudinal zones, in the manner of the mediaeval mural narrative. Figures, objects, and scenes gain dimensions and proportions that do not correlate with reality but are based on the importance that the artist assigns them, while the iconic references—a flying musician, scenes with a ploughman and the digging up of potatoes, emblematic fragments of the landscape and of rural architecture—are more transparent and comprehensible in their symbolism than in any of the preceding pictures. Ruling over all this is Fulla's autonomous, subjective conception of colour, which emotionally and symbolically binds the work together:

The three zones that develop the central idea of Fulla's painting *Song and Labour* delineate, through their colouring, the colour composition of the whole. A composition of browns, reds, green-blues and bluish tones. Of yellows that permeate all three zones. The delicacy and richness of their transitions; their combination; the sensitive, contrastive placement of clean and jewel-like tones into sections of muted colour, keep the entire painting in a state of tension and density.³⁴

Yet behind Fulla's large-scale pictorial conception was a desire to do more than simply present the achievements of his painting style and his other explorations. All the different elements of the composition undisguisedly refer back to the picture's fundamental, content-related intention: to become a mythic parable of the Slovak world, of its primary, pastoral-agrarian essence.

Directly connected with *Song and Labour* is another painting from this series, which emerged about a year later: *Madonna with Ploughman* (*Madona s oráčom*, 1936). The Madonna in Fulla's work is a model example of a whole range of possible artistic approaches and ideas. The *Revúcka Madonna* (*Revúcka madona*, 1926) of his early coloured linocut strikes us as a worldly figure, almost suggesting a peasant woman with a child in her arms. He underlined the religious nature of this motif in the painting of the same name, using painterly means of expression. Here we see the basic geometric mode of his future approach, which he developed in further variants both in graphic work (*Madonna*, 1929) and in painting. *Madonna with Angel* (*Madona s anjelom*, 1929) and the 'Parisian' *Madonna* (1931) are two crowning paintings, in which the Madonna motif becomes a mere pretext for the presentation of a purely visual conception. That conception is founded on the relationship of the compositional analysis of forms and shapes to the actual liberated dynamism of Fulla's handling of paint, brushwork and colour: a dynamism that relies on a very intricate geometric structure. Fulla stylises the figure by reducing it to circles, triangles, and diagonal lines (to allude to another famous, Cezannian, method). He soon abandons these stylistic rules for a more realistic conception of the figure in *Madonna in Red* (*Madona v červenom*, c. 1935), proceeding to enhance the motif lexically and augment its epic aspect with glorifying elements in the final variant of *Madonna with Ploughman*, following the intellectual and pictorial conception of *Song and Work*, though much less convincingly. The later *Madonna with the Angels* (*Madona s anjelmi*, also known as *Gingerbread Madonna* (*Perníková madona*, 1946), which reached back genetically to the 'Parisian' Madonna, had been used as the main image of the poster for the exhibition *Old Art in Slovakia* (*Staré umění na Slovensku*, 1937). This picture was part of a series of decorative, folk-costumed figures, painted in a sign-like, two-dimensional manner, with which Fulla, after 1946, once again illuminated his palette. Yet he always handled that first theme, one of the most widely used in his work, in a plebeian and secular fashion: the Madonna was for him always principally a mother and a country woman, a symbol of motherhood and of the healthy, vital roots of the nation and its people.

Let us consider two other sources of inspiration that infused Fulla's work and, to a large extent, set the tone for his intellectual and visual conception: the inspirations of folk art and mediaeval art that he both adopted and elaborated on. Fulla's relation to folk art had already been noted by art critics and historians upon his debut. Vladimír Wagner traced Fulla's visual gifts back to 'the primordial soil of Slovak artistic talent',³⁵ and the writer Jozef Cíger-Hronský, author of a monograph on Janko Alexy, expressed the view that 'he followed after the primitives of his region and seemed to be portraying the very stone or tree that he had first touched in his childhood'.³⁶ Zdeněk Hlaváček, in a later publication, paraphrased observations he had made about Fulla in the 1920s by describing traditional folk art—after the well-known metaphor of F.X. Šalda—as 'Fulla's mother language'.³⁷ According to Oskár Čepan, the most fundamental aspect of Fulla's work was the way it 'combines the morphology of modern painting with the archaic forms of folk art'.³⁸ The artist's relationship to folk tradition was, however, much more complex and structured than such comments suggest; as we shall see, it changed and developed over time, adapting itself to serve particular intellectual and sociological contexts. Besides this it also had its own psychological and temporally-specific, cultural-historical dimension. Fulla's unique contribution and his essential difference from older traditions of painting lies in the fact that, in his work, the inspiration of folk culture did not remain something external but entered the internal laws of his visual and artistic world.

Miroslav Lamač wrote of Fulla that he 'was surrounded by the things that he painted'.³⁹ Fulla was occupied his whole life by visual-associative memories from his childhood and youth, by memories of the Slovak countryside and the patriarchal environment of Orava and Liptov, then virtually untouched by civilisation. Such reminiscence probably played a primary role in forming

his conception of the image. His oft-cited, subsequently-stylised recollections and representations of the distinctive municipality of Liptovské Revúce, with its colourful female waistcoats and its abstract ornamentation, are one example of his peculiar artistic selectivity at the level of visual memory and perception.⁴⁰ It was above all the clean, unbroken signal colours (in their basic combination of red, yellow, blue, and green) and the linear, rudimentary, abstracting character of primitive folk art that Fulla adopted at the beginning of his career (though we should note that he applied these elements selectively). In his later work he found his own use for elements of folk decorativeness or ornamentation, as based on their capacity for abstracting as well as on the repetition and variation of a core motif. Alongside his reflection on his own past, Fulla's involvement with folk and mediaeval art in the 1930s might have been modified by another important cultural-historical circumstance. Within the broader consciousness, folk art—to the credit of both domestic and foreign specialists and intellectuals active in Czechoslovakia at the time—began to be seen as an important element of Slovakia's spiritual and also specifically its artistic, compositional tradition, as part of the artistic heritage that had developed in this territory since early mediaeval times. This was in fact principally to the credit of Karel Šourek, who conceived the monumental Prague exhibition *Old Art in Slovakia (Staré umění na Slovensku, 1937)*, in which the phenomenon of cultural heritage was extended to include rustic and folklorised artefacts.⁴¹ Another proponent of these ideas was the art historian (and the first writer of a monograph on Fulla) Vladimír Wagner.

It would be very difficult, in view of the sources available, to trace precisely the path of inspiration leading to Fulla's use of the icon and aspects of mediaeval art. Though in his written reminiscences he only vaguely recalls noticing aspects of Eastern and Western culture during his studies in Prague, he did prove interested specifically in Byzantium and, above all, the Russian icon. The 'exquisite holy images', the icons of the famous Russian masters and the 'allure' of their 'radiant colours', enchanted him during a visit to Leningrad and Moscow in 1937.⁴² Prior to that he had probably only known these images from reproductions. Yet motifs drawn from icon paintings had appeared previously in his work; he himself discussed these inspirations in regard to the picture *Song and Labour*. This artwork had been on display in Paris for several months when he came face to face with the icons in the Russian museums. A love for icons had been a feature of his youth, and his study of reproductions in Kondakov's work has been noted in relation to this.⁴³ Matušík has also mentioned Fulla's visits to 'the Ukrainian Academy, where he acquainted himself with the tradition founded by Bilibino'.⁴⁴ Yet it is worth noting that Fulla's relationship to the icon, which in its original orthodox and liturgical context always appeared as a cult object, was motivated primarily by its artistic aspects. On the other hand, it should be recognised that his personal inclination towards 'Christian' art was something completely natural for him. Indeed, besides the aforementioned Giotto, he also later acknowledged his love for the Renaissance, the Trecento, and Fra Angelico.

Dušan Buran, who has conducted the most detailed analysis of Fulla's relationship with mediaeval painting to date, has expressed the rather daring hypothesis that the icon made its way into Fulla's work via his knowledge of the work of the Russian avant-garde (Kazimir Malevich? Vladimir Tatlin? Vasilii Kandinsky?).⁴⁵ The stumbling block for this hypothesis is that it cannot be supported by any verifiable facts, even less so perhaps than could the possible parallels and analogies in his typographical work. Later, however, Buran espouses a different proposition about the primary role of Fulla's visual memory, about its selective character, about the capacity to synthesise the pictorial conception through the sophisticated elaboration of a whole spectrum of stimuli. In this sense Fulla was not one of those intellectuals who needed to elucidate these issues and questions conceptually or to classify them in actual scientific terms. He was above all an artist, and, as we know, artists generally have a tendency (a need?) to obscure or muddy any traces of origin, rather than owning up to them. Whatever the other aspects of his relationship to Byzantine and mediaeval art, he found in it a support for his personal worldview, his lifelong religious devotion and his ideas of a still-enduring pan-Slavism and a contemporised Slavophilia. Significant aspects of this art for him include: its archaic iconographic figures and its compositional schemes

(evident particularly in Fulla's variations on the Madonna and the Crucifixion); its arrangement of scenes into strips; the narrative organisation of cycles into registers, one on top of the other, that we see in mediaeval mural painting; later, the use of the triptych form; the emphasis on the sacral, hieratic frontality and statue-like character of the figures; the adoption of reverse perspective; the two-dimensional manner of presenting a subject; and the non-representational, expressive, and symbolic role of colour with gold effects. In the first half of the 1930s, Fulla was able to elaborate and integrate all this into his pictures partly in his own fashion, and partly also in the spirit of the postulates of modernism, whose aim was to suppress as much as possible the mimetic qualities of the picture, its realistic and objective discursiveness, in the name of its artistic autonomisation, while always simultaneously emphasising and preserving its intellectual message and the emotional unity of his art. And while Fulla, the reflective and serious modernist, could mediate such an aim through the form of his paintings, he always did so in relation to their content.

According to Ján Abelovský, the painting *Song and Labour* was the proverbial 'turning point' for Fulla, after which his chief ambition became the portrayal of the 'national myth in its traditional form'.⁴⁶ While, in Fulla's work up to that point, the Slovak theme had been one of a series of themes, among which civic and urban subjects dominated, from this moment on the inclination towards national issues became the determining one. Unlike his predecessors, however, Fulla sought to shift the Slovak theme to the level of modern painterly representation and to express it through formal and artistic means. He also now definitively settled on the compromising approach towards avant-garde conceptions of the picture that he maintained thereafter. We have already noted that Fulla's most radical sidestep away from the avant-garde took place in the applied disciplines; it is now time to mention, in regard to that fact, another hypothesis. The fact that Fulla did not continue in the realm of abstraction was not only the consequence of the conservative environment in which he lived and worked, or of the Slovak public's unpreparedness to understand a new method of artistic expression. This fact probably had much deeper and stronger motivations, internal and related to Fulla's personality. The artist grasped the picture as, in its own way, a sacred artefact, one that is supposed to have its own 'aura' and must communicate or be the interpreting medium for a specific ideational message. For Fulla it was essential that the picture remained bound to the concrete subject and to the expressed idea arising from it: 'For him, a step towards radical abstraction meant ... a step towards the abyss'.⁴⁷ It was in this way that Fulla's convictions triumphed over his artistic explorations, and that the more traditional aspect of his talent won out over a transitory avant-garde experimentalism (still sometimes seen as a 'timeless' element of his work even today).

Optical Reality and the Reality of the Picture

So far we have examined Fulla's efforts and forays on the field of the avant-garde, but we cannot neglect another side of his work, one that to a greater or lesser degree concerns a more faithful manner of presenting reality. This stands as proof that there was another Ludovít Fulla: someone who was matter-of-fact, more conventional, perhaps even more conservative. The latter term seems too harsh a way to describe his work; it would not be entirely right to take those creative strivings and tendencies of thought that found expression in several works of a different nature, and set them simply and mechanically in antithesis to Fulla's other works. In the beginning, amid the formation of the new pictorial conception that upset traditional relations with the object and its representation, there arose several works in which Fulla preserved the unity and wholeness of external reality as mediated through sensory perception. Here he neither abstracted nor analysed reality, nor did he break it down into parts, yet he also did not attempt simply to copy it, subjecting it still to artistic deformation and stylisation. Simply put, the core agenda in creating these works was not experimentation with form.

Fulla remarked for the first time on so-called 'realistic' painting in 1934, in a well-known and oft-cited conversation with Jaroslav Zatloukal. To the extent that Fulla himself felt a need to explain his situation, he described one group of his works—the more abstract and 'artistic' ones—as 'compositional' painting as opposed to 'realistic' painting. 'Realistic painting has always

interested me and I really learned a lot from it. I later transposed it to the compositional manner of painting that is my own characteristic style. The results of my engagement with realistic painting, which I cultivated from time to time and developed virtually in parallel with my characteristic work, were never shown to the wider public for the simple reason that they depended more on nature and did not constitute for me an act of full expression'.⁴⁸ In this regard, Radislav Matuščík spoke of the 'tension between two aspects', of the polar relationship between 'the more concrete and the more abstracted'.⁴⁹ The presence of two different expressive standpoints in Fulla's work can be explained by his capacity to see and express the surrounding world in several, or at least two, different visual modes at the same time.

As a perceptive artist Fulla certainly grasped that he would not conquer any new territory of artistic thought with this style of painting. It might be asked then why he created pictures of this kind. Did these works comprise a 'privatissimo' that Fulla, as he suggested, did not want to make too public? In the late 1920s and early 1930s, this 'concrete' manner of expression began to appear especially in two genres of painting, and later graphic work as well: the portrait and the landscape. At the very time when he was producing his most radical experiments in painting, he also produced two portraits: the civically oriented *Likeness of P.P. (Podobizeň p. P., 1930)*, and *Girl from Ždiar (Dievča zo Ždiaru, 1931)*, which has a folkloric theme, depicting the head of a young girl in folk costume. According to Iva Mojžišová, Fulla used a photographic source here, which was certainly highly unusual for him.⁵⁰ We can add to these a slightly later work, *Portrait of a Lady (Portrét panej, 1934)*, in which Fulla depicted, in three-quarter profile, his future wife Juliana Klára. Yet it is difficult to describe these pictures as 'realistic' in the true sense of the word, though they retain a sensory and empirical basis. Fulla may adhere to the aims of portraiture—namely, to capture effectively and faithfully the concrete motion or position of the head and body (whether *en face*, or in half- or quarter-profile) and the psycho-physiognomic traits of the face of the subject—but he also submits these renderings to a visually expressive, painterly, and temperamentally-enlivening transformation. He moulds these likenesses with thick paints and strikes the canvas with powerful, not too 'groomed', and slightly disorderly brushstrokes. The artist certainly does not hide his inspiration by the formal approaches of Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, or Fauvism. In a similar vein, Fulla capitalised on what he had learned from these approaches in early landscape paintings such as *Barracks (Kasárne, 1927)*, *Port in Marseilles (Prístav v Marseille, 1929)*, *Winter Motif (Zimný motív / Zimný motív od Černovej, c. 1930)*, *Landscape from Liptov (Krajinka z Liptova, 1931)*, *Landscape from Donovaly (Krajina z Donovalov, 1934)* and *Kráľova hola* (small version produced in 1933).

To sum up and underline, the turn towards reality and concreteness was probably more the result of Fulla's luxuriant talent, which the artist felt the need to verify and test out with more than one approach. At the beginning, when his choice of artistic methods was by no means homogenous (as is quite natural for a young artist), this was about a process of searching, the fulfilment of creative curiosity and a taste for trying out the maximum number of possibilities. In the second half of the 1930s these factors were joined by other, extra-artistic ones: after years of struggling and battling for the avant-garde, which was no easy endeavour in conservative Slovakia, Fulla ascertained through his own art that one could also prove publicly successful with 'concrete' paintings. Indeed in 1936 he received an award for landscape painting with his picture *Landscape from Donovaly*, while the second, larger, more refined version of *Kráľova hola* (1937) probably originated in a commission. In this way, Fulla could attract the interest of the domestic market, even if the latter then only existed in a rudimentary form. His initial client was the state (as embodied in specific departments and institutions), along with various individuals who knew the artist, had some connection to his art, and came from the middle ranks of the intelligentsia (often the medical sector). Though Fulla certainly enjoyed being successful and recognised, he still did not like selling his pictures. This was something that he initially only did exceptionally, for personal reasons and perhaps as a means of livelihood (though it is difficult today to find the proof to either confirm or refute this hypothesis). Despite, or perhaps because of, his peculiarly 'speculative' character, he took great care to preserve and cultivate his legacy of artwork, the result being that

this work never got scattered among various private collections. In the 1940s Fulla made perhaps his most marked retreat from his established artistic positions. His painterly approach was now no longer concrete or objective, but aimed rather at an illustrative descriptiveness, while his work generally evinced a creative floundering, determined by personal and extra-artistic realities. In the 1950s it was still possible to find in Fulla's work some signs of the old style and brushwork, with their characteristic multiplicity of paths and tracks followed, though such signs tended to appear in works of a private nature that the painter had no intention of making public. By the turn of the 1950s and 1960s the characteristic style had weakened virtually to the point of disappearing, as Fulla's artistic stance became ever more homogenous.

Translated by Jonathan Owen

- 1 Katarína Bajcurová, *Ludovít Fulla* (Bratislava: Petrus/Slovart/Slovak National Gallery, 2009).
- 2 Ludovít Fulla, *Okamihy a vyznania*, Ján Medved (ed.) (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1983), p. 163.
- 3 Radislav Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo slovenského fondu výtvarných umení, 1966), p. 45.
- 4 Ludovít Fulla, 'O najmenších umelcoch', in *1934–1935. Výročná správa učňovských škôl a Školy umeleckých remesiel v Bratislave. Päť rokov práce v novej budove* (Bratislava: Nákl Správnej komisie učňovských škôl a kuratória Školy umeleckých remesiel v Bratislave, 1935), p. 21.
- 5 Fulla, 'O najmenších umelcoch', p. 21.
- 6 Reproduced in *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, 3–4 (1932), unpaginated (self-published).
- 7 Fulla, 'O najmenších umelcoch', p. 22.
- 8 Iva Mojžišová, 'Bratislavská utópia Josefa Vydru', in Ján Bakoš and Iva Mojžišová (eds.), *Kontexty českého a slovenského umenia. Zborník z konferencie Ústavu dejín umenia Slovenskej akadémie vied* (Bratislava: Správa kultúrnych zariadení Ministerstva kultúry, 1990), p. 48. On the history of the School of Arts and Crafts (ŠUR) see: Iva Mojžišová, *Škola moderného videnia. Bratislavská ŠUR 1928–1939* (Bratislava: Slovenské centrum dizajnu/Artforum, 2013).
- 9 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 46.
- 10 Vladimír Wagner, *Ludo Fulla* (Prague and Prešov: Československá grafická unie, 1935), p. 11.
- 11 Želmíra Duchajová-Švehlová, 'Tvorba Luda Fullu', *Živena*, 28/8–9 (1938): p. 216.
- 12 Eva Šefčáková, *Grafika Ludovíta Fullu*, exhibition catalogue, SNG (Bratislava, 1962), p. 4.
- 13 *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, 2 (1930), unpaginated.
- 14 Wagner, *Ludo Fulla*, p. 8.
- 15 Fulla, *Okamihy a vyznania*, p. 295.
- 16 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 40.
- 17 Oskár Čepan, 'Človek pred obrazom a obraz za človekom', *Slovenské pohľady*, 80/1 (1964): p. 137.
- 18 Fulla and Galanda intended to launch a magazine to publish their manifestos and views. However, there were only three issues (no.1, 2, and 3–4).
- 19 Zora Rusinová, 'Básnici s podviazanými krídlami', in Katarína Bajcurová (ed.), *Fulla 2002*, exhibition catalogue, SNG (Bratislava, 2002), p. 120–130.
- 20 *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, 1 (1930), unpaginated.
- 21 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 55.
- 22 Zdeněk Hlaváček, 'Slovenské malífství přítomnosti', *Index* (25 May 1932), unpaginated.
- 23 *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, 1 (1930), unpaginated.
- 24 Dagmar Poláčková, 'Typografia 1924–1932', in Bajcurová (ed.), *Fulla 2002*, p. 145.
- 25 Iva Mojžišová, 'ŠUR a moderna', in Zora Rusinová (ed.), *Dejiny slovenského výtvarného umenia – 20. Storočie* (Bratislava: SNG, 2000), p. 23.
- 26 Iva Mojžišová, 'Konštrukcia, pohyb, svetlo. Podnety a predchodcovia kinetizmu na Slovensku (1929–1939)', *MAD/Art Periodical* 4 (2002): pp. 18–27.
- 27 Thomas Štrauss, 'Das Handwerk, die Volkunst und die Vorkriegsavantgarde. Die Kunstgewerbeschule von Bratislava 1928–1939', in Susanne Anna (ed.), *Das Bauhaus im Osten. Slowakische und Tschechische Avantgarde 1928–1939*, exhibition catalogue, Städtisches Museum Leverkusen (Leverkusen, 1997), pp. 32–49. Štrauss alerted us to the need for a thorough exploration of the relationship between Fulla and Kudlák, who was active around 1921 in the Ma-Kreis Viennese circle of Hungarian emigrants, and who as a student at the School of Arts and Crafts could have provided his teacher with 'some direct information about Kassák, Bortnyik and Moholy-Nagy, in all of whom Fulla had a deep interest'. For more information see: Thomas Štrauss, 'Kassáki impulzus. Néhány rejtett összefüggés', in *Kassák 1887–1987*, exhibition catalogue, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria (Budapest, 1987), pp. 31–37.
- 28 The magazine *Slovenská grafia* came out between 1929 and 1933 and was dedicated to raising the standard of printing and to promoting beautiful examples of print. It was published by a Bratislava firm of the same name run by Karol Jaroň, and it published articles by progressive authors (Josef Rybák, Jaroslav Vodrážka, Karel Štika, Ladislav Sutnar, Zdeněk Rossmann, Vladimír Clementis, Adolf Loos). Fulla designed the journal's first volume (1929–1931).
- 29 *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, 1 (1930), unpaginated.
- 30 Harald Olbrich, 'Die Kunstgewerbeschule in Bratislava und das Bauhaus', in *Bauhaus im Osten*, p. 58.
- 31 Iva Mojžišová, 'Vydova nová škola', in Igor p. Meluzin and Vladislav Rostoka (eds.), *ARTSCHOOL. ŠUR + ŠUP + ŠÚV = 75* (Bratislava: Rabbit & Solution studio, 2007), pp. 49–50.
- 32 Ján Kostra, 'U maliara Luda Fullu', *Elán* 10/4 (1939): p. 5.
- 33 Fulla's works were part of the exhibition *L'Art Moderne Tchécoslovaque*, which was first held at the Gallerie Jean Charpentier, and later in the exhibition grounds of the just-built Palais des Arts under the heading *Exposition Internationale de Paris 1937*. The selection was prepared by Jaromír Pečírka a Václav Nebeský, the latter of whom incorporated these works into an opinion-forming publication: Václav Nebeský, *L'Art Moderne Tchécoslovaque (1903–1933)* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1937). Fulla's *Madonna* (1931) was acquired by the French state as part of a collection of Czechoslovak modern art, among works by Josef Čapek, Jan Zrzavý, Emil Filla, Otakar Kubín, Antonín Procházka, Otto Gutfreund and others, and originally belonged to the collection of the Musée Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris (today it belongs to the Musée National d'Arte Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou).
- 34 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 57.
- 35 Wagner, *Ludo Fulla*, p. 11.
- 36 Jozef Ciger-Hronský, *Janko Alexy* (Bratislava: Učiteľské vydavateľstvo slovenské UNAS, 1934), p. 14.
- 37 Zdeněk Hlaváček, *Ludovít Fulla* (Prague: Nakladatelství československých výtvarných umělců, 1962), p. 9.
- 38 Čepan, 'Človek pred obrazom a obraz za človekom', pp. 135–137.
- 39 Miroslav Lamač, *Maliari o sebe a svojom diele* (Bratislava: SVKL, 1964), p. 440.
- 40 Lamač, *Maliari o sebe a svojom diele*, p. 440.

41 An extensive publication appeared in connection with this exhibition: Karel Sourek (ed.), *Umění na Slovensku. Odkaz země a lidu* (Prague: Melantrich, 1938).

42 Fulla was part of the delegation of artists sent to the exhibition of Czechoslovak art. But this did not take place at the Treťiakov Gallery (as he had expected), but at Moscow's State Museum of New Western Art (Gostudarstvennyi Muzei Novogo Zapadnogo Iskusstva). He published his observations in the essay 'O ruskom a našom výtvarnom umení', in *Robotnícke noviny* (5 December 1937). In his opinions at this time, Fulla was evidently leaning away from 'extremely modern directions' towards more conservative standpoints, and stressed the social function of ('comprehensible') art. At the time when he visited the Soviet Union, the concept of Socialist Realism, as established by Stalin's diktat, had already taken over.

43 Nikodim p. Kondakov (1844–1925) was an art historian, expert in Old Russian art, Byzantologist, and founding figure of modern Russian archaeology. After the October Revolution he emigrated and settled in Prague. Following his death, the Seminarium Kondakovianum (1925) was created in Prague in his honour, and this institution published his four-volume work *Russkaja ikona* (1928–1933). In 1931, the Seminarium was turned into the Archeological Institute of Nikodim p. Kondakov.

44 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 13. In 1923, the Ukrainian Artists' Studio, also known as the 'Ukrainian Academy', arose in Prague, and this offered a whole system of education in the field of fine art, applied art, and architecture. It was open to new European artistic currents and attracted the elite among the Ukrainian emigrants. It ceased its activities in 1952. In 1925, the studio established a museum collection, and after the studio's closure in the 1950s this was transferred to the Slavic Library.

45 Dušan Buran, "...v hľadání absolútna..." Niekolko úvah k téme Fulla a stredoveký obraz', in Bajcurová (ed.), *Fulla 2002*, p. 137. As to whether Fulla was aware of the work of the Russian avant-gardists, today we can only speculate. Little help is offered by overly general statements made by Fulla, like the following: 'My models? It is hard to answer this question. There were not just one or two models ... There was the whole breadth of modern French art, which reached us from the West, through all the different routes, like a swelling wave whose crest foamed with an absolute creative freedom. Names like: Braque, Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Chagall, Dufy...'. Fulla, *Okamihy a vyznania*, p. 289.

46 Ján Abelovský and Katarína Bajcurová, *Výtvarná moderna Slovenska. Maliarstvo a sochárstvo 1890–1949* (Bratislava: p. Popelka and Slovart, 1997; 2nd ed. 2000), p. 403. English version: Beata Havelská and Kevin Slavin (trans.), *Art in Changing Times. Painting & Sculpture in Slovakia 1890–1949* (Bratislava: p. Popelka and Slovart, 2000).

47 Buran, "...v hľadání absolútna..."", pp. 131–140.

48 Jaroslav Zatloukal, in *Slovenský denník* (22 July 1934).

49 Matuščík, *Ludovít Fulla*, p. 44.

50 Private correspondence.