

1. How do you spend your summer? Do you also use your holiday time to discover new "Art brut" works? Do you make a habit of travelling during the summer to see art?

I don't particularly set aside the summer period to increase my collecting activity, although it's true that I have always tried to direct my holiday trips in the past to areas where there was an opportunity to expand my knowledge of art in general (museums, galleries), or where there were places with a "presence" of folk or marginal artists that I had learned about or whose works I wanted to acquire for my collection or just to document. Thus, for example, I associate certain areas of Slovakia and specific locations visited during my holidays with the names of artists whom I admire and consider to be excellent representatives of spontaneous creation: the Orava region of Babín with Štefan Siváň, Štiavnik near Bytča with Ján Labuda and Pavel Bavlná, Horná Štubňa in Turčianska with Matěj Čupec, Východná in the Tatra foothills with Martin Sabaka, etc. Recently, my holiday trips have been to Italy, which we have travelled from north to south (from Liguria to Apulia) and visited unique original gardens and environmental environments of marginal creators also in Sicily and Sardinia. I then presented medallions of Italian art brut artists, accompanied by documentary photographs, in several exhibitions entitled Worlds of Outsiders.

From this fleeting glance back, it is clear that I follow a kind of "artistic" compass even in summer time.

2. How, in your opinion, could Art Brut be described in one sentence?

A true, uncalculated authentic creation, springing from the innermost existential feelings of its creator, which is usually not described as art, but as a personal statement, a hobby or a necessity.

3. What does Art Brut mean to you personally?

What is art brut for me? I would probably answer that it is the innate skill of the creator to talk creatively and with unusual imagination to the world around him, but also to his own inner self. And this in a focused, humble fascination and amazement, without knowing anything about the complexity of art and its functions as they are commonly understood in today's society. What matters most to me is the revelatory and cathartic ability to disrupt established cultural patterns. The necessity, the intrinsic necessity of a strong creative preoccupation, amazement, and a clinging assault on one's own human imagination. The desire to conquer beauty (and of course not only beauty) without any other reward than the powerful experience of desire itself.

From a different perspective, for me, art brut represents the subject of a lifelong interest and joy in seeking and finding expressions of human creativity, imagination and dreaming, coupled with a desire to save and present these works as the antithesis of hypocrisy, hypocrisy and a consumerist relationship to the world.

4. Are there enough people in Bohemia and Moravia interested in Art Brut and unschooled art? Do you have information/outreach activities that deal with this type of art?

I think that there are enough people genuinely interested in this type of art in our country, but indeed significantly fewer than in countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Finland or neighbouring Poland, which is mainly due to cultural tradition and the existence of a larger number of marginal artists and collection institutions and galleries that focus on these artefacts.

In our country, only the North Bohemian Gallery of Fine Arts in Litoměřice is focused on this area of work, and the Museum of Art in Olomouc is also rather marginally devoted to it.

In addition to about four larger private collectors (including the well-known film director Jan Švankmajer), exhibitions and other events are regularly organised by the ABCD association in Prague, of which I and ten friends are also members. In addition to large collective exhibitions of art brut (currently, for example, the exhibition "No (Power)" is taking place in Prague's DOX), we organize lectures on the topic of art brut or publish newspaper articles and interviews.

5. You organize or co-organize the Art Brut film festival Olomouc. How did this festival actually start? How are you informed about new films and how do you acquire films? Can you recommend any titles to us?

In 2011, I initiated the creation and regular holding of an intimate showcase of films focusing on spontaneous artistic creation by untrained authors. After an agreement with the then director of the Olomouc Museum of Art Pavel Zatloukal, who promised to unequivocally support this idea, a new tradition of a non-competitive, non-commercial showcase of films and videos dedicated to the remarkable phenomenon of art brut or outsider art in its broadest sense was established. In addition to films about art brut artists, the festival also presented films focusing on the world of naive, marginal art outside the norms and their intersections. The Prague association ABCD, another of the co-organisers of the show, also wanted from the beginning to recall the little-known fact that it was in Olomouc in 1908 that one of the world's leading and highly acclaimed artists of art brut, Anna Zemánková, was born and lived. The theoretical and organisational background of the film show was found in the Olomouc Museum of Art, which focused part of its collection on this special kind of authentic creativity. Gradually, the mapping of the situation in the field of original filmmaking in the Czech Republic, but also in other countries in Europe and around the world, began. Between 2012 and 2020, the festival screened over fifty films from the field of spontaneous artistic creation.

The selection of the programme for each edition is based on a long-term concept, based on the desire to present the best of art brut in Central Europe and the world. I try to follow film production in this field on the Internet and in the professional press, and I obtain films directly from their directors or creators or from specialized institutions such as the Slovak Film Institute. If I were to recommend or highlight a film that has most recently caught my attention, it would definitely be the feature-length documentary by American director Jeffrey Wolf, exploring the remarkable life and work of the black slave and now famous and award-winning art brut filmmaker Bill Traylor. The film is called *Chasing Ghosts* and we premiered it at this year's ABF Olomouc 2022.

6. You've been collecting untrained art, I think, since the early 70s. What was your first encounter with Art brut/Outsider art and what made it so appealing to you that you have been involved with it practically all your life? How extensive is your collection?

I started collecting the art of non-professional artists at the age of twenty-three as a student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Olomouc after I read in *World Literature* 5/6 of 1969 an essay Report on a survey of pataphysical settlements, accompanied by abundant photo-documentation of art objects that struck me for their simple honesty and communication. This was in 1972, when I naturally knew nothing about the French painter Jean Dubuffet and his collecting enthusiasm for raw art and theoretical essays advocating this particular kind of artistic expression against the stifling cultural patterns of Western civilization. I didn't encounter terms like art brut, marginal art or outsider art until many years later. It was only then that I recognized that my slowly growing collection included works of folk art, naive art, as well as creations that could be classified as part of the broad current of art brut or new invention. This recognition, however, has not changed my relationship to individual untrained

artists and their works, which, incidentally, live on the walls of my apartment in a strange symbiosis with the professional work of artists as well. In fact, I perceive the objects of my collecting passion, which from the beginning has oscillated between an impatient need to "complete or expand the collection" and a period of relatively calm resignation to its given state, not so much as artefacts as documents, souvenirs, mechanisms triggering memories of extraordinary moments of encounter with these wonderfully ordinary, pure people and the authentic environment of their homes, bearing the unmistakable trace of their immediate relationship to creative life. This is what I find most important and most rewarding about collecting, years later.

From the above, it follows that the size and number of works in the collection is not important to me, but over the fifty years the collection has grown naturally and so currently numbers around seven hundred items.

7. What artwork in your collection do you consider to be truly unique and why?

I consider the painting by the painter Mr. Václav Beránek entitled "The Water Queen and the Sailing Shipwreck" to be quite extraordinary and unique. It is an oil on canvas from 1972 with impressive dimensions of 150 x 250 cm. The large dimensions of this work are only one of the reasons for its high rating. Another is its author Václav Beránek (1915 - 1982) whom I consider one of the most original Czech spontaneous artists. His original occupation was carpenter, but he worked most of his life as a railway worker. He liked to draw since childhood, but he did not start painting consistently until 1965 (he produced only about 60 oil paintings and a few dozen drawings). He also wrote fairy tales and manifestos. Enchanted by the guileless fairytale world to which he took refuge from the bitter experiences of everyday life, he created idyllic scenes (the cycle about Rusalka is well known), influenced by the undercurrent of erotic dreams, or anecdotal accounts of various stories. His paintings were created slowly, after a thorough drawing preparation. I organized his first solo exhibition in 1981 at the Olomouc Music Theatre. He also took part in many collective exhibitions in this country and abroad (Montreal, Lugano, Reggio Emilia, Zagreb, Paris, Bratislava, etc.). It is noteworthy that there is a documentary film (entitled Painted with Coal) about the creation of the above-mentioned painting, which was filmed with a commentary by the painter Václav Beránek by the Slovak director Eugen Šinko.

8. Please tell us about the project Stanica Svet by Martin Sabaka?

The Slovak artist Martin Sabaka, who can undoubtedly be counted among the original authors in the field of raw art, has left behind a remarkable work consisting of about thirty spatial objects depicting iconic world-famous buildings in a distinctive way, including the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty and the famous Tower Bridge in London. The process of rescuing and revitalizing the work of this shoemaker, railwayman and untrained spontaneous artist Mr. Martin Sabaka (1925-2016) from Východná, which I initiated a year ago, aims to create a permanent presentation of his surviving architectural and sculptural work in an art-educational exhibition called "Stanica svet Martina Sabaka", bringing not only the knowledge of his original and unique authentic artistic creativity (evoking emotional and aesthetic experiences of visitors), but also drawing attention in a very strong and convincing way in the second plan (cognitive and educational function) to the serious global ecological problems of our time, in connection with the progressive devastation of nature, the loss of mineral resources, the decline of forests, the negative effects of mass tourism (carbon footprint), the accumulation of waste, etc.

After all, the remarkable solitary (continuous thirty-year activity) of the untrained creator Mr. Sabaka was primarily focused on the improvised reuse or recycling of no longer needed

waste from the landfill. It was a daily manual, intellectual, artistic, experimental and evolutionary creation, penetrating from the closed intimate world of the humble and thoughtful artist into the public space. This environmental and creative character of the activity of an individual who, after retirement, did not become a passive subject of social relations and market mechanisms, but a peculiar, playful creator, capable of inhabiting the landscape of his home in a responsible and, moreover, poetic (!) way, can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and importance of human creativity, as well as to overcome certain stereotypes in the current environmental education of the current young generation and the public in general.

The aim of the "Sabaka project" is therefore far from being a simple preservation and museum display of some curiosity or local oddity and peculiarity, but on the contrary an active and thoughtful drawing of attention to an intactly preserved set of artefacts, based on basic human abilities such as playfulness and the need to create, which are usually suppressed by the civilizing pressures of consumer society.

9. Do you have any interesting tips or examples of Outsider art/Art brut in Slovakia? I would like to draw attention to the work of one of the few truly genuine female art brut artists in Slovakia, who is also represented in my collection. Her name was Eva Droppová (*31.05.1936 - †22.03.2020) and she was born in Bratislava in a German-Hungarian family. She graduated from an electrical engineering high school and worked as a draughtswoman at the textile research institute in Bratislava, where she lived and worked. She started drawing spontaneously in 1991 after a strong emotional shock caused by the serious illness of her only son. Her paintings and drawings, inspired by the medium, were often accompanied by text, such as the formulation of questions posed to ghosts and the like. At first she drew in ink, followed by drawings in coloured markers, tempera, and oil paintings, always on paper. She often combined and chose her techniques randomly. In her own words, she drew or painted completely automatically. She participated in many exhibitions in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Europe.

10. The promised land for Art Brut is probably France or Switzerland. Wherever there are institutions dedicated to the Art brut phenomenon, do you collaborate with any of them? If so, what does the cooperation consist of?

You are right, there are European centres of the Art Brut phenomenon in France and Switzerland. This is of course reflected in the interest of the cultural public in this work. I'm not directly involved with a major institution. I don't collaborate with any institution in these countries, but I am in close contact with a number of galleries and collectors such as Arthur Borgnis gallery Paris, Bruno Decharme (ABCD, Paris) or Sophie Bourbonnais (Fabuloserie, Paris, Dicy). Irregular Heritage of France (PiF) aims to protect and preserve objects created in France by unruly people or outsiders in architecture and art. I posted information about the Stanica svet project on their organization's blog (<http://patrimoines-irreguliers.org/2022/04/22/martin-sabaka-dune-decharge-il-a-cree-un-monde>) and I have a long-standing collaboration with their active member Roberta Trapani, where we keep each other informed and pass on professional news from the world of art brut.

11. Do you know the British magazine Raw vision, have you ever contributed to it? Is there any similar magazine in the Czech space? Do you have your collecting activities recorded in any publication? Are there any books/publications about art brut in the Czech language?

Yes, I know the magazine Raw vision, I follow it and I have also published some of my texts in it. The editor of this important medium, John Maizels, recently visited me and looked at my collection. Unfortunately, there is no similar magazine in the Czech environment. In the 1970s and 1980s, the INSITA Bulletin was published in Slovakia, which had an excellent graphic and professional standard and was, like the international Triennial Insita Bratislava, highly admired and appreciated. However, this tradition has been discontinued for various reasons and is the reason for the decline of interest and theoretical reflection on spontaneous creation in our countries.

My collection and the most important artists of my collection are the subject of a publication published in 2017 by Galérie umelcov Spiš and called "From Insita to Art Brut" (see appendix: Art brut catalogue Spiš). It also provides a list of links to articles about my collection or my own texts, which answers your last question. I will supplement my answer with information about my last exhibition, which recently ended in Paris. These are attached.

**And a link to my interview with the English gallerist Jennifer Gilbert about collecting:
<https://www.jenniferlaurengallery.com/projects/pavel-konecny-interview>**

12. Do you also create personally?

I have been involved in the visual arts since childhood. I started out making collages, dabbled in drawing and painted a few pictures, but in time I moved into collecting, which I find more satisfying. And I also like photography. To illustrate, I am including one of my older drawings from the 1970s, which also appeared in an exhibition I did a long time ago, and some photographs from the present.

Finally, I would like to ask your readers to provide information about original unschooled work by people in your area that could be classified as art brut. I would be grateful for them by email:

konecny.p@raz-dva.cz

13. If you feel like it, you have the space and can share your media outputs. I did find a few interviews or articles with you, what do you have any list of links, please share.

Answer - (see #11)

Olomouc 4 Aug 2022

Pavel Konečný