

1920

Jan Zrzavý (1890 – 1977)

Krucemburk, 1920

Jan Zrzavý, the founder of The Obstinate [Tvrdošijní] art group, was an autodidact who retained a very original and inimitable painting and drawing morphology. His paintings are full of subtle melancholy, silence, and mystery. His oeuvre is characterizing of a flowing painterly style, his colors sensitively seep into one another; his stylized and often rounded forms are softly modelled by his unique treatment of light and shadow. Zrzavý's most admired canvas in the collections of the Karlovy Vary gallery is *Krucemburk* (1920) – a dreamlike landscape of sober color scale and one of the few works the artist created in his native Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. He based his paintings on specific motifs and memories of the place where he would spend his holidays, but he transformed them in his own way. The poetic view through the village inhabited by trees, cottages, fences, walls, and the undulating relief of the village square forms a harmonious, balanced composition. The mysterious landscape still-life is deserted; perhaps it indeed is a dreamlike memory... Jan Zrzavý loved Krucemburk precisely because he spent many summers there with his grandfather Jan Zrzavý, the owner of the "Na špici" inn, and his numerous relatives from his father's side (his father was one of 13 children). For two months, he ceased to be the guarded son of a manager from Okrouhlice and could go merrily and freely with his many cousins. In his later years, he especially loved the Krucemburk village square and the church of St Nicholas towering on the hill above it (he painted and drew both of them several times).

Krucemburk eventually became the painter's place of final rest. According to his wishes, his grave is not amid the cemetery, but by the fence wall overlooking the church tower (he supposedly wanted to have a good view of the clock...). Today, the Krucembursk square is named after the most prominent local painter and there is also the Jan Zrzavý Memorial Hall and the headquarters of the Jan Zrzavý Society. The village is the proud bearer of the legacy of the distinctive painter and personality whose quote adorns the memorial plaque: *"I was born in Okrouhlice, but I consider Krucemburk my true birthplace."* And the Karlovy Vary gallery proudly exhibits not only this magnificent landscape painting, but also Zrzavý's later canvases with motifs of boats and the Breton coast. Even the latter, smaller works prove that Jan Zrzavý, one of the most prominent members of the interwar Czech avant-garde, had the gift of brilliantly employing lyrical and poetic means of expression to capture every subject (Brittany, Venice, Ostrava, the beloved Highlands, and an array of figurative subjects).