

# 1980

**Toyen /Marie Čermínová (1902 – 1980)**

**The Painting, 1932**

*The Painting* on display represents the surrealist position of the artist's oeuvre. The color structure in the canvas gives rise to sculptural neoplasms and mysterious and indeterminate objects, which, by engaging with the unreal environment, acquire new symbolical, albeit often indecipherable, fantasy meanings. It is like Toyen's words: *"In the dark hall of life, I am looking at the projection screen of my brain."*

Marie Čermínová was born into the family of a postal assistant. At the age of sixteen, she left home and earned a living in the Prague district of Žižkov as a worker in soap production. Between 1919 and 1922, she studied decorative painting at the School of Arts and Crafts. The pseudonym Toyen was allegedly invented for her by the poet Jaroslav Seifert in the years when she was already part of the avant-garde movement and wore a men's suit.

One of the most important moments of her life was her encounter with the painter, writer and photographer, Jindřich Štyrský (1899–1942), which resulted in a lifelong friendship. They met on the Korčula Island in the summer of 1922. In 1920, they joined the avant-garde association uniting members of the young Czech artistic generation, Devětsil [Butterbur]. In 1925, they left for Paris where they introduced their own artistic style – Artificialism – in the following year. It was a peculiar poetic alternative to Surrealism and Abstraction and was the opposite of Cubism.

Toyen also was a member of the Surrealist group around André Breton and Paul Éluard, whom she and Štyrský met in Paris. After returning to their homeland in 1934, they became the founding members of the Group of Surrealists in Czechoslovakia (along with Bohuslav Brouk, Karel Teige, Vincenc Makovský, Vítězslav Nezval, and others).

Jindřich Štyrský died during the occupation of Czechoslovakia, in 1942. Toyen hid the Jewish Surrealist, poet and artist, Jindřich Heisler (1914–1953), in her apartment. In anticipation of the impending political upheaval, they left Czechoslovakia and settled in the French metropolis. Toyen continued in her pre-war contacts – she was well acquainted with the main representatives of Surrealism, André Breton and Benjamin Péret.