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BULGARIA

CULTURE /0800/
Painting /0807/

LIFE OF THE ARTISTS.

SOURCE TRIESTE: Bulgarian emigrant who recently arrived in the West.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: March 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This report supplies useful background material about the conditions under which Bulgarian artists today live and work, as already confirmed by other sources,

The case of Prof. ZLATANOV is unknown here.

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Source gave the following first-hand account of the artists' life in present day Bulgaria:

"The representatives of Bulgarian artistic circles who stood up longest to Communist pressure were the Bulgarian painters, who refused material advantages and various honors offered in exchange for their collaboration with the Communist Regime. The Bulgarian painters who quickly adapted themselves to the new Regime became the favorite sons of the Communists. They carry out on paper and canvas the grandiose Communist economic plans, and are well paid for their 'patriotic activity.' These Bulgarian artists have become a mass without a soul as a result of their subservience, and their art has become a street-hawking trade. They have become mass-producers of

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posters, diagrams, and slogans for the Communist Party; they worked in a field for men of debatable talent and, despite this, became famous and wealthy.

The Bulgarian artists who refused to surrender to Communist propaganda suffered a great deal, and finally, after crushing humiliations, had to do what many of their colleagues had done immediately after the advent of Communism, that is collaborate with them in order to survive. One of these painters is Prof. ZLATANOV. /fnn/. Up to 1950, ZLATANOV kept aloof from the so-called "Bulgarian painters' Union" and the "Chamber of People's Culture." He criticized his colleagues for having accepted work which conformed with Communist standards. He even went so far as to accuse them of a lack of responsibility toward the Bulgarian people by having become instruments of a Communist plot, supported by the so-called "visual agitation" /nagledna agitazia/ which, by means of posters, diagrams, etc, would present the Bulgarian people as happy and satisfied. I have heard people say that if Communism should ever fall, the Communist painter Stoyan VENEV would be punished by obliging him to collect personally every copy of his portraits of STALIN and Georgi DIMITROV, for each of which he received a fee of 20,000 leva /old currency./

When Prof. ZLATANOV found himself without work, hungry and homeless, he decided to reach a compromise with the Communists. For this purpose he had to turn to some former colleagues who had already compromised with the Communists and were now in a stable material position. ZLATANOV suffered great humiliation, was the object of jokes, and was insulted by his former colleagues, who, in reality, did not want to help him. The communized Bulgarian painters wanted to humiliate him as much as possible. They wanted revenge for the criticism and insults which ZLATANOV had heaped upon them in the past. A few years later ZLATANOV was accepted into the Union of Bulgarian Painters and the Chamber of People's Culture, but not before having been sent to PEKING for six months to study Chinese art. Within the Union of Bulgarian Painters the struggle among members is even more cruel than among members of the writers and critics union. It should be pointed out that in this struggle the real painters, who maintain that art cannot be controlled and take a passive role, because they are afraid

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of losing their jobs. Therefore, the participants in the struggle are Communist and Communized painters, backed by Communist big-shots who know practically nothing about art. However, just as in the case of the Bulgarian writers, the painters also try to break out of the limited circle of Communist subject matter imposed upon them by the Central Committee of the Party.

From the point of view of material advantages, the Bulgarian painters are completely dependent upon the Communist Regime. With very few exceptions the painters have government jobs. The biggest buyer of paintings at the exhibits is the State, that is the State organizations. Communist big-shots, who are in a position to buy the paintings do so only after the painting they intend to buy has received favorable criticism. The explanation is that they are completely ignorant in art matters. Under such a system, painters who rebel against Communist aesthetics run the risk of dying of hunger. This is one of the main reasons for the decadence of Bulgarian art. Many undoubtedly talented Bulgarian painters had to lay aside their talent and become stereotyped machines at the service of Communist propaganda. This propaganda need such artists and is generous with them. Even a mediocre painter can earn a great deal without great effort, merely by following Party directives. Except for their earnings, the life of the Bulgarian painters is unbearably boring. Their surroundings kill their artistic genius and make them spiritually callous. Some of them have tried to look up old friends in order to move in more cultured circles, but this is dangerous. In fact, if a painter is seen on two consecutive occasions in the Café "Bulgaria," the third time he is shadowed by an agent of the State security and the fifth time he is told that it is not a good idea to go so often to the café which was the old meeting place of the Bulgarian "reactionary aristocracy."

This is the life of Bulgarian artists. In saying goodbye to me, the professor of music NOZHAROV /fnu/, begged me to tell the free world about the miserable life of the Bulgarian artists. I shall do it when I have time, and at the proper moment,"

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