

Ivan Rein's Paris: From the Quartier Latin to Camp Vernet

Ivan Rein (1905–1943) brings us back to Croatia. Unlike Bora Baruh, who as a pre-WWII communist received more attention in post-1945 Yugoslavia, Rein, who perished during the war at the height of his creative life, remained largely forgotten for a number of years. Interest in him was revived only in the early 1980s when his work received an all-encompassing exhibition accompanied a decade later by a monograph.¹ The exhibition and the monograph managed to position Rein's artistic opus, mainly produced during the interwar period in Paris where he spent most of his creative years, in the broader perspective of Croatian and European art.²

1 Growing Up in an Affluent and Acculturated Jewish-Catholic Family

Rein was born in Osijek, a provincial town in Croatia's eastern district of Slavonia. In the early nineteenth century the Habsburgs had declared Osijek

¹ The major contribution to the rehabilitation of this talented artist and attempts to revive interest in and re-evaluate his work was that of Jelica Ambruš, the art historian and curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek, Croatia. Ambruš mounted the first retrospective exhibition of Rein's work in 1982, initially in Osijek, and then in Zagreb and Belgrade. The exhibition and the accompanying catalogue received significant attention and culminated in her monograph published in 1993. See Jelica Ambruš, *Ivan Rein* [catalogue, Galerija likovnih umjetnosti, Osijek] (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 1993).

² The 1982 exhibit included a great number of Rein's works that since 1952 had been stored, largely forgotten, in the Modern Art Gallery and the Cabinet of Graphic Art at the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, both in Zagreb. The main initiator for preservation and rehabilitation of Rein's art, who drew Ambruš's attention to it, was actually the well-known Belgrade artist Ljubica Cuca Sokić, who had been Rein's close prewar friend. It was she who organized the shipment to Zagreb of Rein's surviving art works, kept in Paris during WWII by their mutual friend, the Montparnasse art shop owner Lucien Lefébvre-Foinet. The correspondence and friendship between Cuca and Rein will be discussed later in the chapter. Rein's surviving sister, the late Renata Stefanelli of Vancouver, Canada, the only heir to his art, donated his works to the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek which today holds most of his oils, watercolors, pastels, drawings, and graphics. I would like to thank Ms Ambruš for sharing with me her extensive knowledge of Rein's life and work and for enabling me to see his art. See Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 7–9.

a free royal city, which turned it into an important municipality in Croatia, absorbing cultural and social influences from Vienna and Budapest. Although Zagreb eventually became the leading city, Osijek remained the local administrative center of the region. Its cultural life flourished under the Habsburg Monarchy and included a theater, museum, art collections, and a printing shop. By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was inhabited by Croats, ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Serbs and Jews. The latter formed a community in Osijek in the middle of the nineteenth century and by the turn of the twentieth century there were about 2,000 Jews living there, comprising 8.3 percent of the total population.³

Rein's parents were upper middle class and strongly inclined towards acculturation and integration into the Habsburg Empire's multiethnic society. His father, Mavro Rein, born in Crvenka in the Bačka district, then part of the Habsburg Kingdom of Hungary, was a lawyer who was educated in Vienna. He first worked in Zagreb where he met his future wife, Olga, née Hönigsberg. She came from a well-to-do local family: her father was the proprietor of a tanning factory, and her mother's family (Schwartz) owned the famous "Zagreb" coffee house.⁴ Mavro and Olga Rein eventually moved from Zagreb to provincial towns in Slavonia, first to Sisak and Virovitica, finally settling in Osijek in 1904. Believing in full assimilation, they baptized both of their children, Renata and Ivan, born in 1902 and 1905 respectively, in Osijek's Catholic church.⁵ They soon built a one-story family home in the center of town, while

3 On Osijek's Jews, see *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities: Yugoslavia*, ed. Zvi Loker [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 28–31; Melita Švob, *Židovi u Hrvatskoj—židovske zajednice*, 2nd expanded ed., 2 vols. (Zagreb: Izvori; Židovska općina Zagreb; Istraživački i dokumentacijski centar, CENDO; K.D. Miroslav Šalom Freiburger, 2004), 1:56; 2:367–71; Zlata Živaković Kreže, "Udio Židova u gospodarstvu Osijeka u prvoj polovini 20. stoljeća," *Osiječki zbornik* 28 (2007): 161–70; Ljiljana Dobrovšak, *Židovi u Osijeku od doseljavanja do kraja Prvog svjetskog rata* (Osijek: Židovska općina Osijek, 2013).

4 This information was shared with me by Jelica Ambruš who received it from Renata Stefanelli, the artist's sister. These families are not mentioned in Snješka Knežević and Aleksandar Laslo, *Jewish Zagreb: a Guide to Culture and History* (Zagreb: Jewish Community of Zagreb, 2011), probably due to the lack of the Rein family's ties with the Jewish community.

5 Apparently, Mavro Rein had also already been baptized; see interview with Ljubica Cuca Sokić, *Večernje novosti online*, 1 Dec. 2004, www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadržaj/clanci (last accessed 15 July 2014). There is not much research about such families. Since their baptism excluded them from the Jewish communities, they were not included in the community records and thus information about them is unavailable to researchers dealing with the Jewish population. Nevertheless, they were perceived by non-Jews as Jewish converts, not fully accepted into the Croat and Catholic folds. The problem is even more pronounced for the Holocaust years as they, in most cases due to the racial laws, suffered persecution as Jews, but

Mavro's sister Ernesta, also living in Osijek, was the owner of a large estate on the city's outskirts, known to this very day as "Ernestinovo."⁶

In Osijek Ivan Rein graduated from the elementary school and the city's well-known Royal Real-gymnasium.⁷ However, it was the education he received at home and its atmosphere that were crucial for his intellectual development. In his early youth he was well acquainted with the classic works of literature, philosophy, art, and music. Learning foreign languages opened up further possibilities and enabled use of diverse literary sources. Frequent intellectual discussions at home, in which the children took an equal part, sharpened his independent thinking and judgments. It was especially their mother who supported her children in their interests and talents, primarily in the sphere of art. In addition to such support at home, Rein also received encouragement from his teachers in the high school. Some of them were artists themselves and instructed their more gifted students. Among such students, in addition to Rein, was his childhood friend Oskar Neuman (later Nemon), also of Jewish origin, who became a sculptor. In addition, Rein received private tutoring from local artist Josip Leović. These efforts culminated in 1923 when he, then an eighteen-year-old schoolboy, displayed his work together with that of his teacher in a joint exhibition held in the Osijek municipality's hall.

2 The Croatian School of Painting

Upon completing high school, Rein left for Vienna, where in 1924 he enrolled in the School of Architecture of Vienna's university, hoping to strike a balance between his artistic ambitions and the need to acquire a stable profession and secure future livelihood. However, his encounter with the cultural and artistic life of Vienna of the 1920s, with its art collections in the museums and contemporary works exhibited in art galleries, resulted in a decision to abandon his architectural studies and dedicate himself solely to art. Luckily, his parents stood firmly behind his decision. The entire family moved from Osijek to Zagreb, where they acquired a villa in Josipovac, a beautiful and affluent part of town. In 1925 Rein enrolled at Zagreb's Academy of Fine Arts, in the studio of the by then well-known Croatian artist Vladimir Becić.⁸ Becić, as noted,

their names and additional data do not appear among the lists of victims compiled in the aftermath by the Jewish communities.

6 Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 179–86.

7 In many European languages the term "gymnasium" signifies high school.

8 Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 11–17.

had studied at Munich's Art Academy and in Paris and was a friend and colleague of young Moša Pijade.⁹ Before WWI Becić had also lived and worked in Zagreb and Osijek. After spending some time in Bosnia, upon his return he began teaching at the Zagreb Art Academy in 1924, just prior to Rein's arrival.¹⁰

While at the Academy, Rein also learned from the art and the ideas of Ljubo Babić, a Croatian painter and graphic artist, stage designer, art critic, curator, and teacher, who was the major figure in Zagreb's artistic scene between the two world wars.¹¹ During the late 1920s Zagreb's art students especially enjoyed his curatorial and organizational skills which he used to promote contemporary Croatian artists and—not always with approval of the local art establishment—to exhibit current, especially twentieth-century, French art. At that point in time Rein primarily followed the Croatian school of painting and, under the influence of his teachers, cherished the art of Édouard Manet and the artists who inspired him—Goya and Velasquez, also displaying an interest in Flemish painting. The avant-garde was far from, and even criticized in, local artistic circles. Nevertheless, awareness of the limitations that Zagreb imposed on him as a striving young artist encouraged Rein, upon graduating in 1929, to move to Paris and continue his art education there.

3 Rein's Paris

At the time Rein arrived in Paris, French art was abandoning the experimental avant-garde, primarily cubism and fauvism that had been central to the pre-WWI period, and was turning towards neo-realism as a more conservative solution. The Great War and its aftermath resulted in the need to return to the “old values” and national traditions instead of admiring “foreign” novelties that brought the destruction of form and ultimately, as the conservatives believed, of society.¹² In visual art this tendency, especially during the 1930s, laid out the path between academism and modernism, turning once again towards figurative painting: the landscape, the figure, and the genre scene. Some of the artists, addressing the taste of the bourgeoisie as the new client, found inspiration

⁹ See Ch. 1, 30, 37–38.

¹⁰ See Zdenko Tonković, *Vladimir Becić*, [catalogue] (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1984); Matko Peić, *Vladimir Becić* (Osijek: Revija, 1987).

¹¹ See Libuše Jirsak, “Povratak Ljubi Babiću,” in *Ljubo Babić: dokumenti, vrijeme, galerije, antologija*, Moderna galerija, 14 Dec. 2010–27 Mar. 2011 [catalogue], ed. Ivanka Reberski and Libuše Jirsak (Zagreb: Moderna galerija, 2011), 11–92.

¹² See Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

in the works of the nineteenth-century French masters. Having achieved a high level of proficiency, they added to their interpretations of reality a poetic and nostalgic expression. In terms of politics this meant favoring the so-called French School of Art over the Paris School of Art (*École de Paris*), which was now criticized for its large presence of foreign artists, among whom were a number of Jews who came to Paris from eastern and central Europe, many of them hoping to stay.¹³

For Rein, who received his early training in the conservative atmosphere of Zagreb's Art Academy, the alliance with the French School of Art was a logical continuity. His frequent visits to the Louvre and the art galleries, the art history course he took at the Sorbonne, and the concerts and theater performances he attended all enriched him intellectually and he soon developed a happy sense of fully belonging to his new Parisian surroundings. Living in the Latin Quarter in a small hotel, financially supported by his parents and by the occasional sale of copies of the great masters he painted after the originals in the Louvre, Rein embarked on the systematic development of his art. While starting out by favoring dark colors associated with Manet and the Spanish painters, he gradually lightened his palette and introduced brighter hues and light into his works. Still, this was done in a controlled manner in which drawing always remained the foundation.

At first Rein tried to exhibit his work both in Paris and Zagreb,¹⁴ but, he gradually shifted away from the specific national quality of Croatian art and adopted Parisian, European, and cosmopolitan traits. While this was a natural process, from the point of view of Croatian artists and critics Rein was soon seen as being "foreign." The fact that he came from a well-to-do, urban, cultured Jewish family (that he was baptized never really turned him into a Croat and practicing Catholic) enabled him to adapt more easily to life in the French metropolis, a process in which both his knowledge of languages and his parents' financial help played a crucial part. In contrast, Croatian artists who did not have the benefit of the same conditions and were unable to stay so long in Paris, as they often came there on a one-year state stipend, were more active in local movements and groups at home. For instance, the Croatian artists

13 Romy Golan, "The *Ecole Française* vs. the *Ecole de Paris*: The Debate about the Status of Jewish Artists in Paris between the Wars," in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905–1945*, 80–87. Such trends stood in a stark opposition to the avant-garde Surrealist movement active at the same time.

14 Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 33. In 1931 Rein participated in the exhibition at the Salon des Independents in Paris, in 1932 he showed his work at the group exhibition of Yugoslav artists in Paris, while in 1934 he sent his work to the exhibition of Zagreb's artists held in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb; *ibid.*, 188.

who during the 1930s formed and exhibited as the “Group of Three” (that included two of Rein’s teachers—Becić and Babić—in addition to Jerolim Miše) did celebrate French influence and cherished landscapes, still lifes, and portraits aimed at their Croatian bourgeois clients. However, mainly living and creating in Croatia, their works, especially the landscapes, naturally acquired a “national” character. Connected with the problematic political situation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where Croats often felt unequal and demanded more autonomy, this national trait also bore an important political message.¹⁵ In contrast, Rein’s easier adaptation to “foreign” life and culture in Paris and his non-Croat origins distanced him from his compatriots and the art they created. As a result, his “non-belonging” eventually led to the lack of interest in his art by critics back home. Ambruš associates him at this point with the international *École de Paris* and artists of Jewish origin such as Marc Chagall, Amadeo Modigliani, Jules Pascin, and Chaim Soutine, although so far it is not clear that he associated with any of them.¹⁶ On the contrary, Rein’s isolation would accompany him throughout his short life and, as will be shown, encourage his strong ties with the somewhat younger group of Belgrade artists living and working in Paris since 1936, which also included painters of Jewish Sephardic origin such as the earlier discussed Bora Baruh, Rajko Levi, and Aleksa Čelebonović.

Rein’s early Parisian phase, around 1932, is strongly marked by figural art, structure, and dark colors, clearly based on his early influence: Manet, Velasquez, Goya, and Flemish art. Thus, Rein’s oil painting entitled *The Dead Fencer* strongly recalls Manet’s *The Dead Toreador*, 1864.¹⁷ At the same time his series of large canvases showing reclining women, their portraits, nudes, and half-nudes implies a different style and introduces color, light, and softer brushwork. Nevertheless, the Spanish and Japanese props (*Study of a Woman with a Flower in her Hair*; *A Girl with a Fan*; *Half-nude with Japanese Prints*) as well as the use of black still echo Manet. The intimate atmosphere of such works eventually culminated in *A Female Half-nude with a Raised Arm* (ca. 1932) which, with its stressed expressionism, anticipates Rein’s later portraits and female nudes that often included pronounced eroticism (fig. 5.1). By 1935 he began experimenting in a much freer way with smaller formats, often drawings created in pen and ink, watercolors, or combined techniques.

¹⁵ Vladimir Maleković, *Grupa trojice*, [catalogue] (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1976).

¹⁶ Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 27.

¹⁷ Rein’s *Dead Fencer* is preserved at the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek. See Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 67, fig. 3. For Manet’s painting, currently at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, see <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1179.html> (last accessed 18 July 2019).

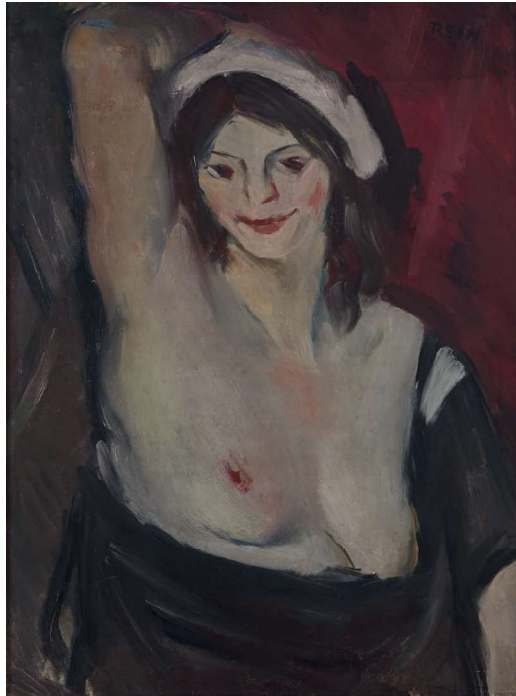


FIGURE 5.1
Ivan Rein, *A Female Half-Nude
with a Raised Arm*, ca. 1932,
oil on canvas, 73 × 54 cm, Inv.
No. MG-4173. Moderna Galerija—
National Museum of Modern Art,
Zagreb
PHOTO GORAN VRANIĆ
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Although he continued to create larger oil paintings, it was these smaller, more spontaneous, and intimate works that would eventually result in a unique personal language. Here the exploration of the erotic theme strongly recalls the art of Jules Pascin (figs. 5.2–5.3), the-so-called “prince of Montparnasse,” known for his daring nudes and wild social life.¹⁸ Rein, like Pascin, turned to a prostitute for a model and created a series of quick drawings depicting intimate scenes of dressing, toilette, or lovemaking. It is not rare that these female models, being French, hang a small cross from their neck which perhaps creates a mocking contrast between the “oldest profession” they pursue and Catholic morals and chastity. Such, sometimes biting, irony became characteristic of much of Rein’s drawings and his worldview in general. In one of these the pink and white prostitute adorned with a cross and wearing dark stockings and high heels is passionately held by a lover shown as an almost inhuman, small, grey and black creature with yellow and red stripes on his back. Although united in a love embrace, the contrast between them seems to underline not only the difference between their sex, but also their religion and race (fig. 5.4).

18 For Bora Baruh’s pride in Pascin’s (Julius Pinchas’) Sephardic origin see Ch. 4, 132.

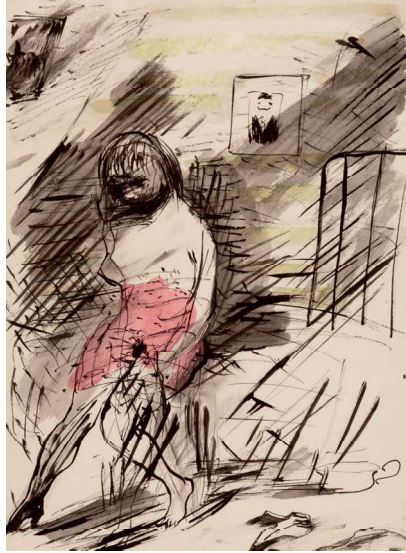


FIGURE 5.2 Ivan Rein, *A Lover (On the Bed)*, n.d. (ca. 1935?), combined techniques, 33.5 × 25.5 cm, Inv. No. MLU-G-1601. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek



FIGURE 5.3 Jules Pascin, *Simone*, 1928, pencil and sanguine, 64 × 49 cm. Private collection

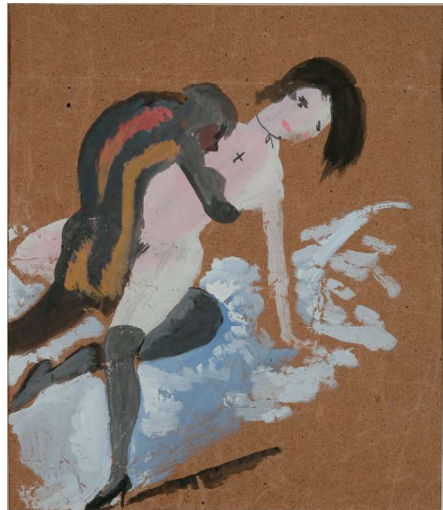


FIGURE 5.4 Ivan Rein, *Lovers*, ca. 1935, combined techniques, 44 × 33 cm, Inv. No. MLU-S-1286. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

4 Social Awareness and Political Protest

The changing political situation in Europe certainly influenced Rein's visions. In 1935–36 he also turned to city scenes and in numerous highly individual works began to capture everyday Parisian life—streets and passersby, parks and squares, metro stations, facades with rows of windows and street lamps, outdoor cafes, and public celebrations. In these often expressive renderings, Rein also displayed elements of humor and the grotesque, paralleled by political awareness. The unfinished sketchy quality of such works and gradual addition of scribbled inscriptions, recalling street signs, posters, and graffiti on the walls as in his symbolic *The Red Wall* of ca. 1936, connect his work to an avant-garde expression closer to that of Weimar Republic artists such as George Grosz, than to his immediate Parisian surrounding (fig. 5.5). As in the case of Baruh, the political changes that served as the background for such works—the Popular Front in France, the Spanish Civil War, and the deteriorating situation in Hitler's Germany—began to influence his art and life.¹⁹

It was exactly at that time, in 1936, that Rein began to develop lasting social and professional ties with a group of mainly Serbian artists of a younger generation from Belgrade who then arrived in Paris. Among them, he drew nearest to the young woman painter Ljubica Cuca Sokić (1914–2009) who subsequently introduced him to her friends. These included artists Peđa Milosavljević, Bogdan Šuput, Drago and his sister, the art historian Olga Kešeljević, Aleksa Čelebonović, and others. As noted, Cuca shared a studio with Rajko Levi and Bora Baruh,²⁰ and it is possible that Bora's social awareness and political activism influenced some of Rein's city scenes, which at that time began to include the industrial outskirts of Paris and views of the Seine and the downtrodden people who inhabited its banks and lived on the boats (figs. 5.6–5.7). Moreover,

¹⁹ Ambruš points to Rein's path as deviating from the general trend of Croatian artists of the 1930s who were primarily dedicated to postimpressionist landscapes and portraits. She finds him to be closer to more individualist Croatian artists such as Vjekoslav Parać, Slavko Šohaj, and Milan Steiner; Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 34. Steiner (1894–1918), who died at an early age, was of Jewish origin, and left a highly unique opus cherished by a number of Croatian artists, seems to have especially inspired Rein. Although ill from childhood and spending his entire artistic life in Zagreb, Steiner was known for his deep interest in contemporary west and central European culture and art. He ordered many books and journals from abroad and regularly followed Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm*, read Nietzsche, and showed an interest in expressionistic traits in modern art from Delacroix and Daumier to Van Gogh, Munch, Max Liebermann, and Kandinsky. His influence on Rein has still to be explored. See Zdenko Tonković, *Milan Steiner: 1894–1918*, [catalogue] (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1987).

²⁰ Ch. 4, 150.



FIGURE 5.5 Ivan Rein, *The Red Wall*, ca. 1936, combined techniques, 66 × 51 cm, Inv. No. MLU-S-1105. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

like Baruh, Rein felt the need to react to the events of the Spanish Civil War, especially to scenes of atrocities, victims, and refugees.

Numerous drawings created with ink and brush, some as an obvious homage to Goya and his early nineteenth-century etchings depicting tragic scenes of the Franco-Spanish war, responded to the current tragedy developing in Spain. Like Picasso's *Guernica*, Rein's works such as *A Boy Transferring*

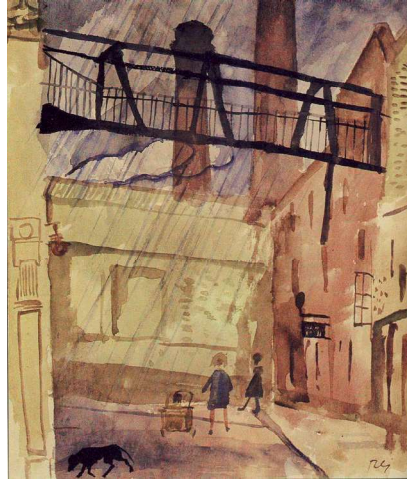


FIGURE 5.6 Ivan Rein, *The Outskirts of Paris*, 1936, watercolor on paper, 32 × 23,5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek



FIGURE 5.7 Ivan Rein, *Laundress on the River Seine*, ca. 1936, watercolor on paper, 32.3 × 50 cm, Inv. No. MLU-S-1339. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

Weapons on a Donkey; Execution in Spain (with an inscription in French: “Nous ne venons pas ennemis mais en libérateurs” Espagne Julliet 1936); a portrait of *Dolores Ibárruri Pasionaria* (with the inscription “Meeting [sic.] du vélodrome d’Hiver pour L’Espagne” and the date 3 Septembre 1936); *On the Barricades*; *A Woman Stabbed by a Bayonet*; *A Hanged Man*; *A Hanged Woman*; *Underneath the Gallows*, and others, clearly indicate Rein’s intense involvement with the Spanish Civil War, its atrocities, and the support that the International Left offered the Republicans (fig. 5.8). Aleksa Čelebonović recalled the artist group’s identification with the cause and the central role played by Baruh:

“... through the apartment of Bora Baruh pass the young men on their way to Spain, and one of our friends who knows well all the famous French leftists among the writers and the painters introduces us to some Yugoslav behaving in a reserved manner, whose real name we never discovered.”²¹

Like Bora Baruh, Rein displayed a special sensitivity towards the refugees and they also appear in some of his compositions. Moreover, he visited the refugee

21 Aleksa Čelebonović, *Ljubica Sokić 1937–1977: retrospektivna izložba*, [catalogue] (Belgrade: Umjetnički paviljon “Cvijeta Zuzorić”, 1977), [no page numbers].



FIGURE 5.8 Ivan Rein, *Execution in Spain*, 1936, ink wash on paper, 22 × 31.6 cm, Inv. No. MLU-G-1585. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek



FIGURE 5.9 Ivan Rein, *Refugees*, 1936, ink wash on paper, 27.3 × 40.3 cm, Inv. No. MLU-G-1592. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

camps in Paris to even better learn about their difficult situation. Thus his depictions of them do not show them as a displaced group of people in an open landscape that, as we saw in Baruh's work, gradually developed into an almost abstract form composed of patches of color, but rather as a single family, with which it is easier to identify. Rein's refugee scenes often include only women with children pulling heavy carts loaded with all their possessions through the city streets (fig. 5.9). In 1937 Rein also took part in the exhibition of the Yugoslav artists in Paris at the Galerie de Paris, in Faubourg Saint Honore St., in which, as noted, Baruh also participated. Among the works Rein exhibited, today known only by their titles since they seem to be lost, were *The Night* and *Wounded Man* (oils) and *A Woman Beggar* (tempera), also suggesting his social and political awareness.²²

5 Letters to Cuca: On Being Jewish, Yugoslav, and Universal on the Eve of WWII

Aside from his surviving art works, it is possible to gain much knowledge about Rein from the letters he wrote to Ljubica Cuca Sokić. Cuca, who left Paris sometime towards the end of 1937 and possibly returned for a shorter period of time from late 1938 until the spring of 1939, remained in close contact with Rein through a number of letters the two exchanged between January 1938 and October 1941.²³ Although her letters to Rein were lost, she was able to preserve

²² See M. P., "Pismo iz Pariza," 7; Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 41, 188.

²³ Cuca's biographies usually state that she studied in Paris between 1936 and 1939, but Rein's letters show that she was going back and forth between Belgrade and Paris, with longer periods in Belgrade, to where his letters were sent. Ljubica Cuca Sokić's father was

his, and today they offer a fascinating insight into Rein's personal and artistic world in a period of increasing danger and approaching world war, and into the artistic life and ties among the young generation of mainly Serbian artists whose careers would soon come to a forceful end or be disrupted.²⁴

"An honest friendship is such a rare thing! And I am so happy to have a few friends and you I count among the best, because you are for sure the most honest one," wrote Rein to Cuca.²⁵ Due to that friendship, Rein was able to open up and share with her his most intimate ideas about art, his aesthetic preferences, descriptions of works in progress (often depicted in the letters in small penned-in drawings), and criticism of the art created by their friends. Even more valuable are his worries and expressions of bitterness, depression, and feelings of non-belonging that were often coupled by his courage and determination. In the wake of WWII, such confessions throw a unique light upon Rein as an artist of Jewish origin who was simultaneously a cosmopolitan, a Yugoslav, and a Croatian artist caught up in one of the most difficult periods of modern history.

The first letter, written on 27 January 1938, already provides an example of such complexity.²⁶ While on the one hand Rein complained that they did not like his paintings "down in Zagreb," and that "they" (i.e., the Croatian authorities) would "rather buy Beelzebub's painting, than mine," on the other he criticized the Serbian painter Vasa Pomorišac, one of the founders of the Serbian group "Zograf," for his false "classicism" which he found provincial.²⁷

a well-known Belgrade journalist and owner of the leading newspaper *Pravda* and the printing house by the same name. The family lived at 8 Vlakovićeve St., where the *Pravda* offices were also located. Rein's letters were sent to that address. For details about Cuca's biography, see her interview in *Večernje novosti online*, 1 Dec. 2004, www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadržaj/clanci (last accessed 15 July 2014) and the article by her great nephew Miomir Miša Gatalović, "Atelje Cuce Sokić: svedočanstvo njenih ljubavi," in *Pasteli Ljubice Cuce Sokić*, [catalogue] eds. Irina Subotić and Nevena Martinović (Kragujevac: Galerija Rima, 2012), 34–80.

24 Ambruš was in possession of the copies of some of those letters, from which she quotes at different places in her monograph on Rein. After Sokić passed away, the entire correspondence was deposited in the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU, Inv. Nos. 14897/1-14897/34), which allows a more in-depth picture of Rein, his art, personality, and relationship with Cuca and their friends. Availing myself of such a unique opportunity, I have quoted from the letters extensively. I would like to thank Prof. Milan Ristović and Prof. Žarko Korać, of the University of Belgrade, for their help in tracking them down.

25 Letter, Paris, 12 Dec. 1938, SANU, 14897/11.

26 Letter, Paris, 27 Jan. 1938, SANU, 14897/1.

27 Ibid. As noted, "Zograf" had for its aim departure from Western influences and the revival of the Serbian medieval and national tradition preserved in fresco and icon painting, and local history (Ch. 1., n. 87). By 1938 the group was already in its decline; see Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 464.



FIGURE 5.10
 Photograph of Ivan Rein, ca. 1939–1940. Private collection

“Oh, Rubens, Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Greco, Courbet, Delacroix, Renoir, Manet, and Cézanne, and then ... Pierre Bonnard,” sighs Rein, calling on all his personal “gods” for help against the mediocrity of Vasa (“whom I like personally”). From the same letter it is also possible to learn that Rein was able to find consolation in his English friends: he visited the Scottish church, sang psalms, listened to the Protestant preacher’s sermon in English, and was invited in the evening to the reverend’s home for tea and cake. His siding with the giants of Western art and (due to his knowledge of the language) with members of the English and Scottish minority in Paris, underline his cosmopolitanism, perhaps even his aloofness. On the other hand, Rein experienced his non-belonging as painful otherness—worse than “Beelzebub’s.” Although, judging from his extant photographs, the handsome thirty-three-year old man (fig. 5.10), when comparing himself to “too loud and too young” Bogdan Šuput (a Serbian artist in Paris, one of Cuca’s friends in his mid-twenties), the probably jealous Rein writes half-mockingly, half-seriously: “... but I am not made for this merrymaking and happy-go-lucky, me so ugly, perverse, that even dogs bark at me if I pass near them.”²⁸ Moreover, he claims that everyone laughs at him for not playing football well and for not being able to pronounce “r” as it should be (in Serbo-Croatian). “My clumsiness became legendary. Everyone else is allowed

²⁸ Letter, Paris, 2 Dec. 1938, SANU, 14897/ 9.

to make mistakes as much as they can and wish, but my smallest mistake is immediately noticed and commented upon.”²⁹

Rein's ironic low self-image and half-mocking half-real suffering parallels the deteriorating political situation in Europe. On 3 October 1938, two days after Hitler marched into Sudetenland, an act of aggression approved by France and England as a “sacrifice” for temporary peace with Germany, he wrote a letter to Cuca that addressed his fears, resignation, and disappointment, but also announced his mounting strength and determination:

I am sorry that you feel so bad in Belgrade. Here it is not at all better ... What has happened is so terrible that one cannot recover from it so fast. I am not in condition either to paint or to do anything normal. I am so worried because I don't earn anything; what will become of me, sometimes I would like to commit suicide, only not to have to see all the horrible things that are approaching, against which people do not do anything.

But he continues to boost her morale:

For now, one has to be brave and to patiently endure this life, which is no more even a battle, but only a wandering in the fog.

I am very happy that you paint so much. You should only work and not fear anything; if in work today one does not find any more fame and recognition, one can at least find forgetfulness, and this is already a lot. Painting is a kind of opium. I know that neither Tintoretto nor Goya thought like this, but they did not find themselves, so to say, in a fortress without weapons and defense.

Here everything is dead and empty. The Americans have left by the thousands. Their embassy asked them to leave. Fortunate Americans.

Don't listen to anybody, just work.

And a little further on:

The Louvre was closed. All galleries empty. Little by little life will reawaken, but everyone feels “as a lamb led to the slaughter.” This peace is worse than—you know.

Even so, Rein could still express hope in humanity when describing an encounter with “some gentleman from Belgrade” who accompanied his daughter to a

²⁹ Letter, Paris, 26 Oct. 1938, SANU, 14897/5.

boarding home for young girls and for whom he served as an interpreter. Upon learning from him that he is “a peasant’s son,” Rein indulged in a celebration of the inborn intelligence and simplicity of “our folk”: “Such a wonderful person I did not meet anywhere. Clever and smart is our folk. It has a wealth in itself, with giftedness and talent. We talked about everything.” Rein, the highly urban, polyglot, cosmopolitan artist and converted former Austro-Hungarian Jew, could not be further removed from the nouveau riche Belgrade gentleman of peasant origin. Still, the admiration for his straightforwardness and raw intelligence projected Rein’s enthusiastic Yugoslavism, and the wish to belong, to be proud of “our folk.”

He also found fervor and consolation in the art of his heroes: “I study Venetians, and Spaniards, and Delacroix, whom I visited in his studio. You laugh how I write [about him] as if he is still alive, but in our times there are no longer such people.”³⁰ Such longing to live in different times is repeated in a letter written about two months later: “Peđa [Milosavljević] gave me Vollard’s book on Renoir—ah, if I would have lived in those times. It is like a story about the lost paradise.” In contrast to such a dream, Paris is now “... cold, wet, and full of enemies, really as a robber’s cave, ugly as an old procuress,” and also “black as sooth, and people are like ghosts that come straight from Goya’s drawings.”³¹

Some of these feelings may have come from the fact that his new painting *The Old Woman* (possibly also entitled *The Old Spanish Woman*) received a negative review in the Parisian paper *Mariane* which claimed to see borrowings from Picasso.³² Rein, much hurt by such comments, apparently especially felt in need of Cuca’s friendship and support, as he began the letter very warmly: “Dear, little Cuca, little because you are really so sweet. It has been a long time since I was so happy upon receiving a letter from someone ...” The meetings with friends at Dôme, the famous Montparnasse café, where many well-known artists used to gather, draw, and exchange ideas, provided him with a sense of fulfillment.³³ Upon encountering there Marko Čelebonović, Aleksa’s older brother—by then already a known Belgrade painter,³⁴ Rein describes him in a characteristic central European Ashkenazic way as a “well-mannered young man filled with some Oriental melancholy,” thus romanticizing Čelebonović’s “Oriental” Sephardic origin.

30 Letter, Paris, 3 Oct. 1938, SANU, 14897/4.

31 Letter, Paris, 12 Dec. 1938, SANU, 14897/11.

32 Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 45. *The Old Spanish Woman* was exhibited at the Exhibition of Yugoslav Painters and Sculptors in Paris in March 1939; see *Politika*, 26 Mar. 1939.

33 Billy Kluiver and Julie Martin, “Carrefour Vavin,” in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905–1945*, 72–73.

34 See Ch. 1, 56.

Still, what comforted him most was his own Parisian neighborhood where he found an island of beauty and peace: "You say truthfully that you like my quarter [i.e., the Latin Quarter]. I often go to the Church of St Sulpice [in the 6th arrondissement] and look at Delacroix's frescoes. Sometimes the organs play and then it is even more beautiful."³⁵ Although not a practicing Jew or Christian, because of Rein's conversion he was at home with the Catholic service (the catechism being a compulsory subject in school) and must have felt entirely at ease in church, being able to fully enjoy the aesthetic, visual, and auditory gratification it offered. In addition, his letters are filled with references to the large paintings he is working on, mentions of his Louvre studies and copies of El Greco and Courbet, or excitement upon seeing a painting by Bonnard. The small sketches he did of Tintoretto, Veronese, Titian, Zurbarán, and Poussin exhibited in the Louvre, are "only indications of colors and arabesques of composition. I learned so much from them."³⁶

Rein was not the only one who turned to traditional art and strove to combine it with the modern pictorial language, while opposing the abstract and surrealist art of such great leaders of modernism then active in Paris as Kandinsky, Delaunay, Miró, Masson, or Dalí. A group of young French artists, who gathered around the somewhat older artist and art critic Henri Héraud and formed a movement called Forces Nouvelles, was close to Rein's aesthetic preferences. Active between 1935 and 1939, the group launched a neo-realist style. Although short-lived because of the outbreak of the war, in 1938 the members managed to exhibit their works in a group show in the Galerie Billet-Vorms and their ideas were promoted by such contemporary well-known Parisian art critics such as Raymond Cogniat and Jacques Lassaigne.³⁷ The drawing and exploration of light and space became primary, while the colors, now tuned-down and lacking in brilliance, were often limited to grey tones with pink accents. All of those artists, as did Rein, learned eagerly by copying the old masters and cherished the drawings of Ingres, Toulouse-Lautrec, Matisse, and Picasso. Often, such less experimental, more down-to-earth, and somewhat melancholic art was explained by the changing economic and political situation that shaped creative consciousness after 1935: the economic crisis, unemployment, the rise of fascism, and threats of a new war affected visual expression as

35 Letter, Paris, 12 Dec. 1938, SANU, 14897/11. Rein refers here to Delacroix's 1857–1861 murals created for St Sulpice's Chapelle des Agnes.

36 Letter, Paris, 26 Oct. 1938, SANU, 14897/5.

37 Among the artists, then still at the beginning of their careers which most of them continued after WWII, were Robert Humblot, Henri Jannot, Jean Lasne, Alfred Pallan, Georges Rohner, and Pierre Tal-Coat. See Pierre Vorms, *Forces Nouvelles 1935–1939*, [catalogue] (Paris: Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris, 1980).

well. Aleksa Čelebonović well summarized such a trend prevalent also among young Yugoslav artists working in Paris:

We were looking for a deeper knowledge of an inner world, better adherence to pure painting ... and above all some nostalgic sadness for a lost paradise which maybe was felt only by the people at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.³⁸

Rein, brought up on the Croatian art of the famous Munich trio of Miroslav Kraljević, Josip Račić, and his own teacher, Vladimir Becić, even more naturally turned to the traditional form and color of the Spanish artists and Manet than did Belgrade artists, who were still nearer to the post-impressionist color experimentations of the previous generation of Serbian painters. Drawing was indeed the basis of many of his small-size creations, while an inner world, “nostalgic sadness,” and tuned-down color range as described by Čelebonović is evident in Rein’s oils. Thus his 1938 portrait *At the Table* focuses upon a lonely drinker, much in the fashion of Degas or the early Picasso. Although the presence of others—a woman standing in the back and a male interlocutor to the left—are hinted, the sole glass and empty chair opposite the sitter stress her loneliness (fig. 5.11).

The atmosphere developing in Paris after Hitler’s aggression towards Czechoslovakia inspired Rein to paint two large compositions, both lost and known today only due to their descriptions and sketches in a letter. On 26 October 1938 Rein wrote to Cuca:

I am at work on one large painting 2 by 1.65 m. I painted a composition, a cart with a horse on a street, the butchers are removing bloody meat from it; in the background is a little café with children; in the first plane is a female fruit seller and fruit which has spilled on the road, in the other corner is a little boy and a dog that searches through a basket full of fish.

In the continuation of the letter Rein details the sources of his inspiration:

I stumbled upon a slaughterhouse in Villette entirely by chance, and in the same way—entirely by chance—I came upon a dead bull. I started immediately to paint and the workers were so kind that they left the animal lying for a while on the ground, so that I was able to do a small sketch, and later at home I did a larger sketch based on that one.³⁹

³⁸ Čelebonović, *Ljubica Sokić*, [no page number].

³⁹ Letter, Paris, 26 Oct. 1938, SANU, 14897/5.



FIGURE 5.11 Ivan Rein, *At the Table*, ca. 1938, oil on cardboard, 42 × 45 cm, Inv. No. MG-4175, Moderna Galerija—National Museum of Modern Art, Zagreb
PHOTO GORAN VRANIĆ © MODERNA GALERIJA, ZAGREB

The letter also includes a sketch of the painting with a horse cart and spilled fruit on the ground, under which he wrote: “This is in fact the street that I see every day, the scene is from this quarter’s everyday life” (fig. 5.12).

The slaughterhouse, bloody meat, and a dead bull are highly reminiscent of the well-known paintings of such macabre subjects created by Chaim Soutine, the renowned *École de Paris* painter. Soutine’s choice of subject, which in the course of the 1920s included numerous paintings of slaughtered bloody chicken, calves, and the flayed carcass of a bull, is often explained by his feelings of otherness, non-belonging, misery, and suffering, apparently caused by his difficult childhood in the artistically non-supportive surroundings of his traditional Jewish community in Smilovichi, in the Belarus province of Tsarist Russia.⁴⁰ Moreover, the choice of a flayed hanging bull adopted from such a painting created by Rembrandt, is sometimes understood as a

⁴⁰ Norman L. Kleeblatt and Kenneth Silver, *An Expressionist in Paris: the Paintings of Chaim Soutine* (New York and Munich: The Jewish Museum New York and Prestel, 1998).

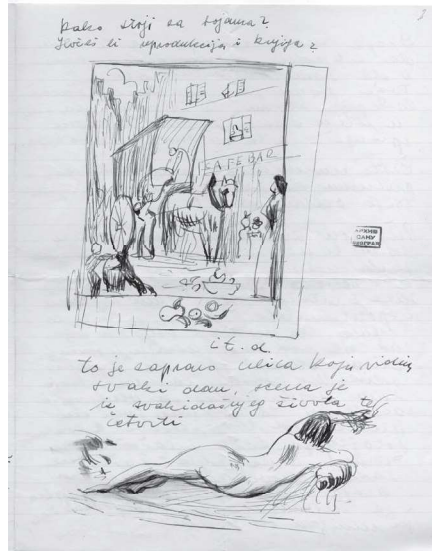


FIGURE 5.12
Ivan Rein, A page from his letter, Paris,
26 October 1938, Inv. No. SANU, 14897/5.
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
Belgrade

metaphor for the Crucifixion as the symbol of human suffering.⁴¹ Rein's bloody meat, spilled fruit, dead fish, and slaughtered bull can be understood in a similar way: the victory of fascism in Spain and the expansion of Hitler's Germany encouraged him to turn to the depictions of animal carnage as a symbol of the human suffering that he felt around him. He was not alone. In 1939 Bogdan Šuput created an eerie oil painting, a *memento-mori* entitled *Skulls* showing a pile of human skulls arranged as a still life among books and vases, while Petar Lubarda, a Serbian painter whom Rein met in Paris in the circle of Cuca's friends, painted *A Slaughtered Lamb* in 1940, depicting the lamb's skull and intestines.⁴² As will be shown, Daniel Ozmo turned to the same subject in order to comment upon the atmosphere in Sarajevo on the eve of World War Two.

In contrast, the same page of the letter includes a drawing of a female nude, viewed from the back, after which the text of the letter becomes more intimate.⁴³ Rein mentions that he often thinks of Cuca; he admits that he even dreamt of her in the summer (and adds: "this is too silly!"). Calling her a very good friend, he mentions blushing after reading how she praised him as an art-

41 Avigdor W.G. Posèq, "The Hanging Carcass Motif and Jewish Artists," *Jewish Art* 16/17 (1990/91): 142–48. Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*, 1655, is in the Louvre.

42 Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 354, 360.

43 There is also an undated drawing of his created in red chalk depicting a nude female figure in the same position (37.3 × 61.8 cm); see Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 152, fig. 129.

ist. He returns her compliments by praising her work, encouraging her before the exhibition of her paintings that she plans to hold in Belgrade, and offers to send her paints, books, and reproductions to help her with her work. Finally, he admits missing her and sends her his love and friendship.⁴⁴ Although, judging from his letters, they were not romantically involved and only maintained a friendly professional relationship, Rein's need for closeness and intimacy is often evident with the deterioration of the situation and the growing danger around him.

The end of 1938 was marked by intensive exhibit activity. The famous art critic and gallery owner Ambroise Vollard chose Rein to exhibit one painting in the prestigious Concours du Prix Paul Guillaume at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery, which made him very proud. He also sent three of his older works, done in 1932, to the exhibition in Zagreb marking fifty years of Croatian painting. In addition, we learn that he was getting ready for an exhibition of Yugoslav artists in Paris, planned for March 1939; he mentions that he is preparing, among others, a copper engraving. He also reports going to the Louvre to copy the legs of Christ from El Greco's *Christ on the Cross Adored by Two Donors* (1585–1590)—“the copy is excellent, I must admit,” he writes to Cuca in the letter of 2 December 1938.⁴⁵ In that letter Rein depicts his progress on all these different “fronts” in a true military style by means of a small sketch showing, in the manner of Jacques Louis David, soldiers firing cannon, with an accompanying inscription: “Allons enfants de la Patrie.” His happiness and well-being is further augmented by Cuca's apparent announcement that she will soon be coming to Paris.

The dichotomy between such energetic creativity and the satisfaction resulting from it, on the one hand, and the feeling of isolation and rejection grounded in the increasing racism and anti-Semitism, on the other, became even more pronounced in 1939. The trigger for Rein's cynical anger was the failure, as he saw it, of the exhibition of Yugoslav artists held in March 1939 at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris, in which he took part. A number of later well-known artists exhibited their works in it,⁴⁶ and Belgrade's leading paper, *Politika*, reported very proudly about the show, presenting it as a national Yugoslav achievement. The exhibition, opened by French and Yugoslav officials, included thirty artists who exhibited their works in two large halls.

44 Letter, Paris, 26 Oct. 1938, SANU, 14897/5.

45 Letter, Paris, 2 Dec. 1938, SANU, 14897/9. For the illustration, see Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 187.

46 Among them were Milivoj Uzelac, Oton Gliha, Peđa Milosavljević, Petar Lubarda, Vasa Pomorišac, Voja Dimrijević, Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Milena Barili, and others.

Their work was understandably very different, since they had come together to display their art not because of their similar aesthetic ideas, as the author of the article, M. Petrović, pointed out, but due to their common origin. Despite this, he claimed, when compared to the 1937 show the level of the exhibited works was higher as the appointed committee this time exercised a much more rigorous selection. The article mentions Ivan Rein's very expressive large portrait of an old Spanish woman and reports that he also showed four more paintings.⁴⁷

Apparently Cuca did not come to Paris although she exhibited three paintings in the Yugoslav show, and Rein wrote to her about it in detail in April 1939. In contrast to Petrović's positive review, in Rein's opinion "our exhibition ... ended in a complete fiasco."⁴⁸ No one sold anything, Rein complains (aside from Čelebonović, by pure chance); the newspapers ignored them and no critical reviews appeared (he was probably referring to the contemporary French press). Rein also wrote angrily about the members of the committee, artists themselves, who were especially rude and created an unfriendly atmosphere, claiming that some allotted themselves the best places in the exhibit space, in the first hall. In the second hall (obviously the one to which Rein was allocated) nineteen artists were exhibited in cramped quarters and the room looked, according to him, "like Europe of 1939." "All of these great masters of ours think that they invented gun powder. The imitation of several well-known French painters is their highest goal," Rein wrote critically, using the pre-war atmosphere in Europe as a comparison.

And then this dissatisfaction and the sense of his being rejected as an artist suddenly turned into a bitter complaint and accusation that brought to the fore his feeling of exclusion based not on professional but on racial grounds. He now wrote as the "other," as a Jew:

I must admit that I avoid all the Yugoslavs like a pest. I don't see even Olga. They all became drunk with their pure Aryan blood and think that in the case of catastrophe they are going to get for free from H.[itler] my canvas stretchers and my paints. Some wait to become guards in a conc. [entrance] camp, and all think that their skin is especially valuable.

I still write to you because you are honest, and your honesty is so great that I cannot spare you the comment that you are almost dumb.

Why apologize for instance for the paintings shown at the exhibition? It is your right to exhibit, and that's it.

47 M. Petrović, "Izložba jugoslovenskih slikara i vajara u Parizu, naši umetnici u Francuskoj," *Politika*, 26 March 1939, p. 14.

48 Letter, Paris, 14 Apr. 1939, SANU, 14897/12.

After making this unexpected, angry, and painful perception, Rein calms down and the letter returns to the usual chatty and friendly tone, with one final comment: that he now sees socially “only Anglo-Saxons and French, who are the only ones who are honest and have some culture.”⁴⁹

The deteriorating prewar atmosphere in Paris together with growing awareness of the danger that Hitler's Germany posed for free-minded Europe in general, and Jews in particular, are clearly in the background of Rein's pessimistic, even prophetic, outburst. In 1939 the Jewish population of France numbered around three hundred thousand. Although they accounted for only 0.7 percent of the total population, in the 1930s the Jews “were not as other French; they were not French whatever passport they might carry; they were simply ‘other.’”⁵⁰ In the midst of a general xenophobia prompted during that period by the growing economic crisis and unemployment, when numerous immigrants—Italians, Poles, Russians, Romanians, and many others—living in France were viewed as endangering the local population economically and culturally, anti-Semitism flourished. It became especially pronounced after 1933 when, in the wake of the Nazi rise to power in Germany, thousands of Germans sought refuge in France. Many of them were Jews, and by 1939 about fifty-five thousand passed through France. The assassination in Paris of Ernst vom Rath, a Nazi German diplomat, by Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish-Jewish refugee, on 7 November 1938 was used as a pretext in Germany for the notorious Kristallnacht pogroms. The burning of synagogues, looting of Jewish property, and murder or arrest of about thirty thousand Jews who were sent to concentration camps only further encouraged their escape to other European countries.⁵¹ “Jewish” became a synonym for “refugee” and their influx to France was often viewed as an “invasion.” A number of intellectuals and leftists among them, who still saw in the French Revolution and the resulting emancipation of Jews an act of enlightenment, influenced Parisian cultural life. From the French point of view, however, the problem was not only that they were Jews, but also Germans—long-time enemies of France—and were thus considered warmongers. There were demonstrations against Jews in Paris and provincial centers; Jewish shop windows were smashed and foreign-looking individuals attacked in the streets. Some approved of Hitler putting German Jews in concentration camps. The number of refugees was even further increased by

49 Ibid.

50 Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in 1930s* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1994), 103.

51 James M. Deem, *Kristallnacht: the Nazi Terror that Began the Holocaust* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2012); Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem*, 37, n. 62.

numerous illegal crossings of the French borders by Jews fleeing Poland and nearby countries, where by 1938 anti-Semitism was steadily growing. Although in April 1939 a decree prohibited incitement to hatred on the basis of religion or race, the activities of aliens continued to be restricted and the arrest and expulsion of illegal foreigners was intensified.⁵²

For Rein, the news from home was not much better either. As noted, anti-Semitism gradually spread through Yugoslavia during the 1930s. Although it was not an institutionalized or pronounced phenomenon, especially when compared to some other European countries, by 1938 Milan Stojadinović, who since 1935 had served as prime minister and minister of foreign affairs and cultivated Yugoslavia's ties with Germany in order to avoid conflict, make economic gain, and combat communism, introduced "the Jewish question" into Yugoslav politics. During his term in office the government became especially intolerant towards Jewish refugees, rigorously limited or rejected entry visas, and in a number of cases, even when individuals had become well adapted and capably served local Jewish and Yugoslav communities in their professions, demanded their expulsion. In an interview to the Parisian newspaper *Petit Parisien* on 23 January 1939, Stojadinović, while trying to justify on one hand such government policy towards the Jewish refugees, claimed on the other that there is no anti-Semitism in relation to local Jews and that they live in "perfect equality." As long as the Jews "will offer proof of loyalty, which was, for example, always the case with Belgrade Jews ... there is no question [of any political changes towards them].... Only the lack of loyalty on their part could change the situation." The Yugoslav prime minister's threatening words were certainly read by Rein and his friends, as they were echoed both in Belgrade's *Politika* and Zagreb's *Židov*.⁵³ When Stojadinović's government lost the elections conducted on 5 February 1939, the new prime minister, Dragiša Cvetković, restored the relationship with the representatives of the Jewish minority. In return, at the congress of the Federation of the Jewish Religious Communities held in April 1939, tribute was paid to the new government which "stood fast against the spread of an anti-Semitic epidemic, which in this country did not appear by itself but was imported merchandise."⁵⁴ However, in spite of such good intentions on the part of both the government and the officials of the Yugoslav Jewish community, anti-Semitic acts and propaganda,

52 Weber, *The Hollow Years*, 108–10.

53 For quotes and comments, see Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam*, 388, n. 58. See also Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem*, 40.

54 Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam*, 393, n. 76.



FIGURE 5.13 Ivan Rein, *Marina in Arcachon II (At the Beach)*, 1939, watercolor on paper, 25.6 × 36 cm, Inv. No. MLU-S-1311. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

spread by nationalist groups through their newspapers and pamphlets in different parts of the country, did not diminish.

Rein's outburst due to his allegedly unjust treatment at the Yugoslav exhibition, his sense of isolation, unwanted otherness, and painful feelings of exclusion as a Jew echoed much of the poisoned atmosphere around him. This may have also been the reason why he decided to travel away from Paris. Although his letters are missing, fine minimalist watercolor landscapes depicting Scotland and Arcachon, a picturesque vacation resort on the sandy beaches of the Atlantic Ocean in southwest France, all dated 1939, inform us about his trips (fig. 5.13).⁵⁵ There is also a letter written to Cuca from Paris on 3 October 1939 which is not found in the archives of the Serbian Academy. Ambruš quotes from it: "It was beautiful there [apparently in Arcachon]. I did not feel so pleasant for a while. I made a lot of drawings and watercolors." Ambruš also explains that the reasons for Rein's departure from Paris to Arcachon were political—after participating in a protest meeting of the left intelligentsia, he became *persona non grata* to the French officials.⁵⁶ Several satirical drawings and watercolors created at that time show French police patrolling the streets of Paris, a woman wrapped in a scarf and holding a grocery basket reading a

55 According to Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 184, Rein traveled to England and Scotland to visit a painter friend and planned a one-man show in London.

56 *Ibid.*, 84, 185.



FIGURE 5.14
Ivan Rein, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, 1939,
watercolor on paper, 31.3 × 23 cm, Inv. No.
MLU-S-1306. Museum of Fine Arts, Osijek

proclamation of mobilization glued to the wall while a dog next to her urinates on the wall, and a soldier standing underneath the French flag and the legend “RF Liberté, Égalité” RF (probably République Française) instead of the missing “Fraternité” (fig. 5.14). In all of these works Rein began incorporating large surfaces of untreated blank paper into the composition, creating the feeling of sketchy immediacy and turning them into an intimate, almost private, comment.

Rein’s travels included also a visit to Zagreb and his parents. In one of the short notes he sent to Cuca, he mentioned painting a “big decoration” in Breyer’s bookstore “which everyone admires.”⁵⁷ He is probably referring to the well-known Zagreb bookstore owned by Pavao Breyer (1904–1944) on Masarykova St., known for its import of foreign literature.⁵⁸ Breyer was a known communist and in the trial against Josip Broz Tito, in 1928, he was sentenced to a year and a half in prison. Upon his release, the Yugoslav police described him as a “hardcore communist” who is “cunning and shrewd” and “organized the Communist Party’s sympathizers.” However, according to a report Tito sent to the Comintern in 1938, Breyer had apparently begun to sell then ostracized works by Leon Trotsky and Ante Ciliga, a Croatian communist and convinced anti-Stalinist, which later aroused suspicion against Breyer among

57 Letter, SANU, 14987/15. The decoration’s whereabouts are not known.

58 I thank Prof. Dr Feja Frank for informing me that Rein used to visit Breyer’s bookstore.

Yugoslav communists.⁵⁹ Rein's decoration for Breyer's bookshop and his visits to it, as will be shown below, with Bora Baruh and Aleksa Čelebonović, are further evidence of his affiliation with the left and sympathies for the communist cause.⁶⁰

But above all Rein was an artist, entirely dedicated to his calling, which is probably why he once again returned to Paris and to the art works he left there in his studio, despite the hostilities spreading through Europe. His letters from this period are now missing, making it impossible to reconstruct the events that followed until April 1940. Back in France, which was engaging in the so-called "Phony War" with Germany before it finally surrendered in May 1940, Rein was arrested and sent to the concentration camp at Vernet near Pamier in Ariège, in the French Pyrenees. There is a telegram sent from Zagreb to Cuca, in Belgrade, on 31 October 1939 with an unusual content: "Hotel sent today the address letter follows Rein."⁶¹ This seems to have been an attempt on the part of Rein's parents to locate him in France (the hotel mentioned was possibly the hotel in St Sulpice Street, in which Rein lived in Paris, to which they turned in a desperate attempt to find out where their son had been taken). When putting Ivan's rescue in the hands of Cuca and her family, they apparently provided them with their son's whereabouts in the camp.

Originally used to shelter refugees from the Spanish Civil War, from October 1939 the concentration camp Vernet also began to include "suspicious" and undesirable foreigners, in particular anti-fascist intellectuals. The largest number of the internees were German and Austrian "suspects," mostly refugees who fled to France in search of shelter. In February 1940 there were 2063 internees, among whom 800 were Jews. There are descriptions of the camp that can help us imagine Rein's experience.⁶² Thus we can learn that the grounds of Vernet were surrounded by three lines of barbed wire fences. The prisoners arrived by train to a nearby station and upon arrival their heads were shaved and they were stripped of their personal belongings. The barracks in which

59 Ivo Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 452 [translated from the Serbo-Croatian original id. *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi liber: Židovska općina Zagreb, 2001)]; id., *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 185, 293.

60 Due to the lack of more in-depth research and available documentation about his life, it is not clear whether Rein, while living in Paris, actually joined the Communist Party as did Bora Baruh.

61 Telegram from Zagreb to Belgrade, 31 Oct. 1939, SANU, 14897/14.

62 Among those imprisoned there was author Arthur Koestler who on two occasions wrote about the camp. See his *The Invisible Writing, Being the Second Volume of Arrow in the Blue: an Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1954) and *Scum of the Earth* (London: Collins with H. Hamilton, 1955). See also Anne Grynberg, *Les camps de la honte: les internés juifs des camps français, 1939–1944* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 1991), 69–87.

they lived were built of boards covered with tarred paper. During the winter of 1939–1940 there was neither heating nor electricity and the internees, having no warm clothes or covers, slept fully dressed. Such living conditions resulted in several flu epidemics but the “hospital” barrack lacked any suitable medical equipment. Moreover, the internees were under the permanent surveillance of the anti-riot police armed with guns and bayonets. Subjected to humiliating and useless labor, they were under constant threat of corporal punishment in case of “unwillingness” to work. The mail was limited to two letters per week and strictly controlled by censorship.

From the following letters to Cuca it is possible to understand that she and her father indeed managed to help and influence Rein’s release from the camp. Six months later, back in his family home in Zagreb, he could not find the words to thank her enough. Immediately upon his arrival on 1 April 1940 he sent her a telegram: “Today safely arrived warm greetings Ivan,” and three days later a long letter describing his return to Yugoslavia:

Dear Cuca, you will be surprised when you receive this letter, and I am surprised too—that I am once again in the homeland and that I sit at my table writing to you. Indeed, there were moments when I thought that I would no more return, and when a ticket controller entered my compartment on the border, I asked him: “Yugoslavia?” “Yes,” he said “Yugoslavia.” He was dressed in a dark suit and had in himself something indescribable—how to tell you: I arrived home.

I know that I owe this return only to you, to you and to no one else, [it is impossible] to enumerate with dull words what you did for my old parents and me; I can tell that you saved their lives, and for me, my freedom and health.

What else can I add? What words to use to describe what I feel? All that I could tell you would be so stupid, clumsy, and banal, that it is better if I remain silent ... What you have done for me belongs to things that one does not forget as long as one lives.

I hope we will meet and laugh together, while talking about Delacroix and Courbet. I still feel as if I woke up, as if I got up from some disease, and while looking at some of my older works I watch them as if it wasn’t me who painted them. It all turns in my head, and the quietness and the godly peacefulness that I enjoy I receive as gifts that I did not earn and of which I am not worthy.

After asking about some of their friends and again thanking her father on behalf of his parents and himself for what he did for them, Rein concluded the

letter: "I am appending a little drawing—according to our old custom. You will write to me, no? I would like to tell you many things—*mais taisons nous* [but we remain silent]."⁶³

The letter includes a drawing of a sleeping person, only part of the head visible, protruding from underneath a blanket covering his or her face up to the nose, with dark curly hair resting on a pillow. Having experienced the harsh conditions in the camp, sleeping in a clean bed was surely something Rein dreamed of and now once again enjoyed. The regained civic status and feeling of security was reflected in the fact that he added to the letter his father's business card on which was printed in bold letters: Dr. Mavro Rein, and the address of his family home: Zagreb, Josipovac 8.

Cuca's father, Manojlo Sokić, the owner and director of the well-known *Pravda* newspaper whom Rein thanked, indeed managed, through the Yugoslav ministry of foreign affairs, to arrange for his release from the camp, after which the French government expelled him to Yugoslavia, without permission to return. In the letter written a week later, now already in a lighter and more humorous tone, Rein described to Cuca the head of a "grimly watching" Turk with a turban he improvised that he painted in the camp, and is now hanging on the wall of his Zagreb studio and looking at him. He explained how Lucien Lefébyre-Foinet, owner of the well-known art supplies shop in Montparnasse and his good friend, sent him paints and a block for sketching to the camp. On the way back to Yugoslavia, while traveling by train through southern France he was accompanied by a French soldier and, as Rein now jokingly confided, they both got drunk, behaved silly, and made the whole compartment laugh. But for him, as a true Francophile, being expelled from France was very painful:

Now I have to live without France, and this is not easy, that knows everyone who knows France even a little bit. By the way, all my paintings remained in Paris, at Foinet's. Also my library, the reproductions. Greco, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, all remained in Paris. Drawings and sketchbooks, and the box of paints, with precious *French* paints. Foinet takes care of them for better times.

Rein also tried to describe for Cuca the wartime atmosphere in Paris: "The Louvre is empty. Notre Dame is hidden behind sandbags. Paris at night without light, illuminated (la Ville de Paris) by the light of the moon—it makes a beautiful impression."

⁶³ Letter, Zagreb, 4 Apr. 1940, SANU, 14897/17.

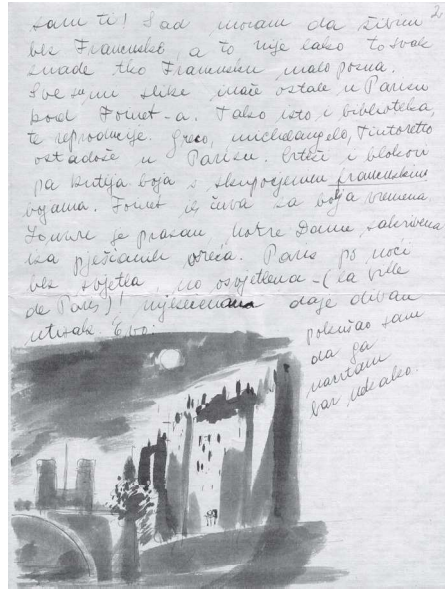


FIGURE 5.15
Ivan Rein, A page from his letter, Zagreb,
11 April 1940, Inv. No. SANU, 14897/18.
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
Belgrade

Here he added a delicate drawing created with brushes, pen, and ink showing Notre Dame, the bridge, and facades of the houses by moonlight (fig. 5.15). Anyone not knowing the background of this drawing would not guess that it refers to his experiences during WWII. While greeting all their friends now in Belgrade, Rein expressed “sorrow from the depth of my heart for Bora,” clearly referring to the fact that Bora Baruh was at that time imprisoned in the Bileća prison camp. Rein concludes the letter with repeated wishes to see Cuca, since “this would make me feel,” as he confessed, “that I have really come to the end of the journey.”⁶⁴

The letter written five days later in response to that of Cuca is filled with nostalgia for Paris and his misery at being forced to leave it, in addition to complaints about lacking creativity and motivation to work. His need for her compassion grew even stronger. He is also jealous of Olga Kešeljević and her brother Drago, Cuca’s friends, who, as he learned from her, were at the time still in Paris. His love for Paris, he writes her, “has something of madness about it.” Two scribbled drawings he added to the letter, one of Notre Dame, a bridge, a painter, and a clochard and the other of Luxembourg Park, with children playing and the Pantheon dome in the background, are attempts, he writes, to calm himself down so that he can continue writing the letter:

64 Letter, Zagreb, 11 Apr. 1940, SANU, 14897/18.

Here I am [i.e. in Zagreb] among the leftovers of my earlier works, drawings and canvases. I feel as if I lost the battle of my life. Since I have to make everything a bit grotesque, I could say that this is the way Napoleon Bonaparte felt after the battle at Waterloo. Go ahead, laugh at me. You will say that I remain as childish as before.

Again, he added a small drawing, this time showing a battle, much in the tradition of Delacroix and Goya—a cannon with fallen soldiers and a wounded horse next to it. In the following lines Rein writes once more about all his books, albums filled with drawings, portraits of Spanish women and children, watercolors from London, Scotland, and Arcachon. All of these were left at the hotel, and he asked Cuca to write to Drago Kešeljević to go there and check on his things. But then he feels thankful once again and in need of celebrating his coming home and their friendship:

Dear little Cuca, I will not torture the paper any longer with these things. I am so happy that I am at home, and that I have in you such a good and faithful friend. If I could see you I would be so happy, I cannot tell you how much. You are my only bright light in this defeat, and let me use one contemporary strategic phrase: the only defense line which did not give in. You stood as an unconquerable fortress—*un roc inébranlable* [an immovable rock]—at the time when everything collapsed around me and inside me, all my illusions and all my dreams.

Aware that his words may be exaggerations, he apologizes, but tells her that his feelings are not. Because “I cannot do anything now,” he asks her to write him about herself and her work. “In general I feel as if I have recuperated from a difficult disease. Everything still turns in my head, and I think sometimes that I dream.” Cynically referring to his camp imprisonment, he adds: “Aside from that I am sunburned and got even bigger muscles—and this is all.”

But then he has a premonition and fear of things that might still happen, accompanied by hope that they will not:

I would like so much to see you and talk to you. We lived through so much and saw so many things together. But I am afraid of, God knows, what can still happen. But maybe nothing [will happen]. My main concern is that we manage to see each other soon and talk. Maybe luck and destiny will be kind to us.

This is one of the very few letters that Rein finishes off by breaking the careful wording of their comradeship, ending it with “loves you and greets you much, your friend (as you call me) Ivan.” And then he adds one more little drawing, this time of a street scene bearing the caption *St Germain des Prés*, with the encircled words “Dear little Cuca” next to it.⁶⁵

It seems that this more emotional and intimate tone of the letter resulted in a pause in their communication, for on 23 May Rein complains that “six weeks have passed since I wrote you and I did not receive an answer. I wonder if I did not write something wrong?! Or that I insulted you in some way? Otherwise I have a hard time explaining the silence.”⁶⁶ This sudden distancing, however, seemed also to have helped him get back on his feet. As we learn from the letter, he sent one of his older works to an exhibition at Zagreb’s Meštrović Pavilion and began to work again, drawing and painting with tempera.⁶⁷ But his nostalgia for Paris continued, and he somewhat ironically describes a painting to Cuca:

I painted Paris from my memory; actually Notre Dame and the Seine with old houses and the Quai—all in black. Above this the black turns into blue and on a white cloud sits Mother Mary with Jesus who extends his hand above Paris to protect it!!! Above the white cloud is a dark zone ... with red strokes. The French tricolor with Mother Mary, and underneath is Paris in darkness, and cold, and rain. I painted this masterpiece 4–5 days ago. Don’t laugh too much about it—will you?

In the same letter Rein mentions a procession going through Zagreb and hearing the bells through the open window.⁶⁸ He cannot go to see it as a colleague is coming for a visit, and he is upset that he is missing it, since “you know yourself

⁶⁵ Letter, Zagreb, 16 Apr. 1940, SANU, 14897/19.

⁶⁶ Letter, Zagreb, 23 May 1940, SANU, 14897/20.

⁶⁷ The Meštrović Pavilion, designed by the well-known Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović in 1938, is even today one of the city’s landmarks, colloquially known as “Džamija” (the mosque). It is round and presents a fine example of the artist’s Secessionist style. During WWII it was converted into a mosque with added minarets, accounting for its popular name. After the war it housed the Museum of the Revolution and today is a gallery and the Museum of Croatian History.

⁶⁸ On 23 May 1940, Zagreb celebrated the Catholic feast of Corpus Christi marked by the Mass conducted by Archbishop Alojz Stepinac in the city’s Cathedral, a festive procession through the streets and squares, and public services at several locations in the center of the city. A number of public figures and politicians took part in it; see <http://www.matica.hr/hr/347/Dru%C5%A1tvo%20Katarina%20ogrofica%20Zrinski/> (last accessed 7 Aug. 2014).

how much I love everything that is spectacular and a bit theatrical." He also mentions that he had sent her a card "for your [i.e. Serbian-Orthodox] Easter. Did this insult you?" Although by doing so he expressed his respect for her different national and religious background, the question about being insulted by it underlines Rein's insecurity and fear of losing her. Did he feel that the religious and national differences, which the prewar atmosphere only intensified, could harm their friendship, or did he fear that Cuca, dedicated to the universal language of art, would find such a gesture too parochial or even, coming from him—a leftist cosmopolitan and a baptized Croatian Jew—ironic? Such insecurity appears also in the closing sentence of the letter: "Otherwise life in Zagreb is not happy now in these sad moments for us, but I don't know what you think about it and how do you judge it." The uncertainty influenced him also to leave unclear to whom he was referring when he wrote "for us"; who were "us"—he, she, and their friends—the universal leftist artists in love with Paris? Or did he mean Yugoslavs, Croats, or Jews?

Nevertheless, Rein's fears were calmed very quickly. Only five days later a letter written in response to one from Cuca announces their plans to meet in Belgrade: "I hope that the world will hold out until Monday; I am very happy, I don't have to say, it is clear."⁶⁹ The full verso side of the letter is covered by a caricature of a little girl ("sorry about this scribbling, I could not resist" is written next to it) wearing a bow in her hair and, net in hand, chasing a butterfly that is already flying above the abyss, while she innocently runs towards the edge of a cliff at the top of the mountain (Triglav, the highest mountain in the Slovenian Alps, is visible low on the horizon, making her place much higher, above the clouds). In the sky above the girl hovers a comic image of an angel, a concerned winged woman in a modern dress with high heels, her head covered as Mother Mary's in religious paintings, as she in panic throws her arms upwards. The drawing, albeit ironically, clearly refers to the mixed feelings—fatalism, danger, naiveté, and helplessness—that Rein tried to express through it, less than a year before the outbreak of WWII in Yugoslavia.

In contrast, the letter written on 21 June 1940 is full of amusement and playfulness. Rein had just returned from his visit to Belgrade and is filled with the warmth and charm instilled into him by the atmosphere of that city and his former Parisian friends now back at home. In addition, part of his art works, books, and clothes came from Paris. Cuca gave him one of her paintings as a present, and his description of traveling back by train with her work and arrival at his family home in Zagreb reveal his humor and happiness:

⁶⁹ Letter, Zagreb, 28 May 1940, SANU, 14897/21.

Sweet little Cuca,

The first thing I am doing is to write you a letter, that I am afraid will be crazier than any other of my letters.... Let me start from the beginning—I managed to comfortably seat your painting and chase away some lady who wanted to sit exactly near it while we traveled.

Now it is hanging in a most honorable place, i.e. I took down one of my own paintings from the best lighted part of the wall and hung yours while singing all kinds of “Catalan hymns.” The handkerchief [that Cuca gave him] serves as a sort of English flag next to the small self-portrait of my friend Petley, hanging next to my bed.⁷⁰

“Catalan hymns” and “English flag” also refer to the current political situation—Rein’s affiliation with the war of the European Left in Spain recently lost to Franco’s Fascists, and England’s engagement in the war against Hitler’s Germany.

The rest of the letter describing the partial return of his art works and possessions from Paris continues to be written humorously, using contemporary military language when talking about the “heavier and lighter wounds” that were inflicted to some of the art works and photographs he received. Still “the morale is excellent”—although “50 percent of the forces did not return. Some fell in captivity, and some died. These units had to endure a most terrible battle, but they withstood heroically. They withdrew in perfect order to pre-planned defense positions ...”⁷¹

Upon arriving home by taxi from the railway station late at night, no one heard him as they were asleep, writes Rein, and it took a while until the chambermaid and the cook woke up.⁷² His parents went to his aunt to listen together to “Mr. Churchill”—“endearing, no?” comments Rein somewhat ironically. This comment refers of course to Winston Churchill, England’s new prime minister, who in the early stages of WW11 was the only statesman unwilling to compromise (in contrast to France), and who actively opposed Hitler. His speeches delivered in May and June 1940 (Rein probably referred to the one broadcast on

70 Letter, Zagreb, 21 June 1940, SANU, 14897/22. It is possible that Rein referred to Llewellyn Petley-Jones (1908–1986), a Canadian painter of English descent who studied and lived in Paris and London during the 1930s. See <https://petleyjones.com/historical-art/llewellyn-petley-jones/> (last accessed 19 July 2019).

71 Ibid.

72 Mention of the chambermaid and the cook, who eventually came down to greet him and pay for the taxi (he spent all his money traveling?) allude to the comfortable bourgeois lifestyle he and his family led in their villa on prestigious Josipovac Hill.

19 June, the day of his return to Zagreb), were listened to attentively on radios all over Europe, as he both called for war against Germany and raised hopes for victory over Nazism.⁷³

However, the next passage in the letter distances itself from the war and refers to the pronounced differences Rein felt between Austro-Hungarian, Croat, and “Western” Zagreb, in comparison to the “Eastern” (or Oriental) Serbian Belgrade that still preserved traces of Ottoman culture. Belgrade’s “otherness” (along with the fact that his friends lived there) attracted him: “Otherwise I have to admit to you,” Rein writes, “that I have great nostalgia for Belgrade, although our streets are more orderly, something I realized already while driving in the taxi. But there are not any Turkish houses here, bu-huuu! What shall I do now without the Turkish houses?!”⁷⁴ Such nostalgia for picturesque old Belgrade streets and remnants of Oriental “Turkish” architecture belonging to an entirely different cultural setting than that of the Austro-Hungarian fin-de-siècle Zagreb in which he lived, emphasizes once again his openness to different worlds and his easiness in appreciating them. Moreover, this enthusiasm for Belgrade and his friends there encouraged him to decide, as he wrote to Cuca, to stay through the summer in Zagreb and work (instead of going to the Adriatic coast for a vacation, as was customary for his class), and save money so that he could travel again in autumn to “where is my heart’s desire, namely to Belgrade.”⁷⁵ He promises “to go already tomorrow to Tartaglia” and later write more seriously.⁷⁶ Bora Baruh is among the friends to whom he sends greetings at the end of the letter, and he asks Cuca to once again thank her parents for receiving him so cordially. With much humor and affection he concludes:

... and finally I shake your hand strongly, as you are my friend No. 1, take care of your health [he underlines], so that you can live long, because I need to be able to think a lot about you and know that you are here, 7 hours away from me. I write you this out of sheer egoism, as it is self-understood, and now keep well! Ivan [signed in Cyrillic, in childish and clumsy handwriting of one not used to signing in that script, which he obviously did as a gesture to his Serbian friend].

73 For the text of Churchill’s speech of 19 June 1940 entitled “Be Ye Men of Valour,” see https://1d4vws37vmp124vlehygoxxd-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Be_Ye_Men_of_Valour_Annotated.pdf (accessed 19 July 2019).

74 Letter, Zagreb, 21 June 1940, SANU, 14897/22.

75 Ibid.

76 In 1940, Marino Tartaglia (1894–1984), the renowned Croatian painter, was an assistant professor at Zagreb’s Academy of Art.

Proudly, he adds next to it in Latin letters: “I managed to master the signature, finally!”

Very excited, already the following day Rein wrote another letter after talking to Tartaglia and beginning to mediate between the Croatian Association of Visual Artists, Meštrović Pavilion of Art, and Cuca and their young Belgrade friends. Thus commenced the planning for what was to be an exhibition of Slovenian and Serbian artists in Zagreb in September 1940. Full of enthusiasm, he added to the letter a little drawing of the novel Pavilion, opened two years earlier, explaining to Cuca its round structure, natural lighting from above, and the possibility of exhibiting all the works under the same conditions and as equally important (in contrast to his frustrating experience in the Paris exhibition). He is willing to do anything to make this event materialize and encourages Cuca to write directly to the secretary of the Association, to be in touch with the Čelebonović brothers who have already been notified by Tartaglia, to organize the group there, whom he calls affectionately “very talented children,” alluding to their young age. Indeed, Cuca and her generation, who mainly studied with Serbian artist Jovan Bijelić who instilled in them the love for color, did organize themselves into a group called “The Ten.” They founded it in Belgrade in February 1940, when they exhibited together for the first time. Their second (and last) show, which Rein helped to organize, was held in Zagreb.⁷⁷ The war, during which some of the members fell as victims, cut short their activity. In spite of the more businesslike tone of the letter, Rein still managed to add a bit of his private fascination for Cuca. He wrote her how his mother admires her painting hanging in his room (thinking it is her son’s!) and how he managed to prevent her handkerchief from being taken to the laundry in order to preserve the smell of her perfume (while letting his mother believe it is a handkerchief he bought once in Marseille ...).⁷⁸

The letters now became very frequent, detailing plans for the exhibition, but also seeking support in the growing tension and uncertainty in the world around them. Thus, on 27 June 1940, Rein wrote:

⁷⁷ Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 467.

⁷⁸ Letter, Zagreb, 22 June 1940, SANU, 18974/23. One can conjecture a number of reasons why Rein made up stories for his mother regarding Cuca’s presents to him (and his affection for her): their primarily professional relationship; her young age; the fear his mother may have felt at the option of him once again leaving his home to join her in Belgrade; her being Serbian-Orthodox while he was a Croatian Jew converted to Catholicism, and possibly some others too.

Dear Cuca, thank you for your letter. I am replying the same day, we live in such times that every minute should be used.... I also feel heaviness around my heart. When I think that our entire world, all that we loved and respected, is falling apart. Poor France! And even more poor—Frenchmen!⁷⁹ I am glad that I can write to you in such hours, I have a great need to be in touch with friends, even in writing. I am very glad that you were already in touch with the gallery. Whenever you need something, just let me know, and I will gladly do it. I think a lot about you and whether we are going to see each other. Everything turns in my head. It is good that you became more serious; don't expend your health and your spiritual strength on "faire le bombe" [lit. to make a bomb; Rein probably means on creating novel and surprising pictorial solutions]. I am happy that you are in such nice company as Bora [Baruh], Vanja and Olga [Kešeljević]. I work here a lot. I finished one new lithograph; tomorrow I am starting another one. Such work takes up all of my concentration. I am in touch with some of my old friends. After my return [from the camp] we cooled down a bit, but that passed thank God, so now I have quite a good time.⁸⁰

I can tell you dear Cuca, how friendships ennoble a person and how a thought about the other enriches....

Write to me please, and when it is so hard for you to draw, that doesn't matter, [I long] only to be able to see your letter with your handwriting. Loves you very much and greets you cordially, Ivan.⁸¹

79 On 14 June 1940 German soldiers marched through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and on 22 June the new French government and its prime minister, Marshal Pétain, signed the armistice with Germany that led to the partial occupation of the country and formation of the free zone ruled by the Vichy government.

80 Ambruš mentioned among Rein's friends Croatian painter Slavko Šohaj, the contemporary art critic Zdenka Munk (after WWII, curator and director of the Museum of Applied Arts in Zagreb), Zdenko Vojnović, who was at that time one of the editors of the journal *Ars*, dedicated to art and culture, Marija Hanževački, the newly appointed curator of the City Museum of Zagreb, Elvira Aranjoš, possibly then also an art theoretician (after WWII she worked in the section for art and culture of the Ministry of Education). They used to meet at the well-known Zagreb coffeehouse, Gradska Kavana and discuss art and culture; Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 34; for biographies of some of these young professionals, see <http://www.mdc.hr/hr/mdc/arhiv/personalni-arhiv-zasluznih-muzealaca/?muzealacId=104> (last accessed 7 Aug. 2014). It is noteworthy that most of Rein's friends in Zagreb were art historians, museologists, critics, and curators rather than artists; however, most of them were, like him, politically left-oriented.

81 Letter, Zagreb, 27 June 1940, SANU, 14897/24.

At the beginning of July Rein, who began to feel more settled and artistically productive in Zagreb, described to Cuca what for him was an unusual event. He participated in the annual procession of pilgrims to Marija Bistrica, Croatia's famous sacred site which until today attracts believers seeking forgiveness of sins, especially the sick and the handicapped, in the hope of being miraculously healed by Mother Mary, whose black statue is preserved in the local church.⁸² Rein's excitement in processions and search for a pristine, folk, and simultaneously dramatic motif for his expressionistic art were probably the main reasons for his visit. Yet simultaneously, he was overwhelmed by the feeling of otherness and the fear of the unknown. Cosmopolitan, urban, and of Jewish origin, Rein must have felt once again very different—this time from the peasant and lower-class population attending the procession. He wrote his Belgrade friend:

I went to Marija Bistrica, on the Feast Day [pilgrimage]. It was very interesting. I drew and maybe I will paint a painting. All this had a very primitive character. Bistrica is a lonesome village on Mt Zagrebačka, so that from the [railway] station I went on foot. I walked for an hour and a half. On the road there were Gypsies, beggars, crippled, also the blind and madmen. Old coaches and peasant carts were transporting the pilgrims to the village. Afterwards I saw a procession with a huge number of people. The impression was mostly horrible, more than anything else. When I think what is hidden in all those brains that are gathered here! All this is primitive and backwards. It seems to me, and I am sure that I am not mistaken, that at your place the folk is somehow more open. But it was very picturesque, these candles in different colors and crucifixes decorated with flowers. And this mass of people that sang not knowing anything about the world and the destiny that awaits them. On the walls there are wonderfully tasteless frescoes about the wonders of Mother Mary. I learned a lot. It is interesting to be in the village. There is something powerful and pristine, maybe because of its backwardness. I don't mean only materially, but also spiritually.

82 Marija Bistrica is a small town northeast of Zagreb, in the region of Zagorje. It is known for its old Marian shrine. In the nineteenth century a neo-Renaissance church erected to replace the old one continued to house the sixteenth-century black Madonna, a wonder-working statue that draws the pilgrims. In 1935 the archbishop of Zagreb designated the statue as Our Lady Queen of Croatia; see <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=38913> (last accessed 19 July 2019).

His encounter with what was, for him, the unfamiliar—yet simultaneously repulsive and attractive—world of religious folk beliefs, enabled Rein to express a credo central for him as an artist creating in a world ripped apart by war:

Otherwise I work, I print the lithographs and I will start to paint. I think that in these terrible times one has to work without pause, because work is also a kind of fight. In general, one has to know what to want and what not, and to act without any compromises. To lose a battle does not mean a lot, but to be morally weak and to give in to destiny, this is actually a defeat.

This belief that art is a form of resistance will be uttered by Rein again and again, clearly helping him to withstand the hardships: “Are you going to the seaside?” he asks Cuca referring to the summer vacations. “I will stay in Zagreb and work without a break, it doesn’t matter what happens.” He makes a cynical comment about Vichy France: “What do you say about so-called France? What a beautiful country!” While expressing sorrow and trying to calm Cuca for not having any news from her friends in Paris—Olga, her brother, and his wife—he suggests trying diplomatic channels and writes: “I say, only courageously. Today courage is the only way that will lead to rescue, the moral one and the other one.”⁸³

The following correspondence—a card signed by a number of mutual friends, among whom were Jurica Ribar, Bora Baruh, Aleksa Čelebonović, Olga Kešeljević, and others that Cuca sent to Ivan from Belgrade—and his somewhat hasty letters of July and August 1940, deal with the preparations for the exhibition in Zagreb that was to be held in September in the Meštrović Pavilion.⁸⁴ Rein is worried about his Belgrade friends’ relaxed attitude, compared to Slovene artists who already advertise their show, and urges someone to come to Zagreb and prepare more seriously for the exhibition. He is helping and mediating, writing an advertisement for *Novosti*. Privately, he is painting, and even managed to sell one of his exhibited works to the Gallery of Modern Art.⁸⁵ He asks Cuca to send him paints from their paint merchant in Belgrade.

83 Letter, Zagreb, 8 July 1940, SANU, 14897/25.

84 Jurica Ribar (1918–1943) was the younger brother of Ivo Lola Ribar who, as noted, being a communist was imprisoned with Bora Baruh. He was a painter active in the group around Cuca. Letters, Zagreb, 31 July, 5 Aug., 20 Aug. 1940, SANU, 14897/26, 14897/27, 14897/28.

85 His participation in the Annual Exhibition of Croatian Artists held in May–June 1940 and the Gallery’s purchase of his *Female Portrait* was reported in the Zagreb press; “U Zagreb

He also writes that he goes to the Sava River, probably to paint and swim at the beaches, and to dance in the evening. Life seems to be normal.

His letter of 12 September was written after the exhibition had closed and had been considered a success. Cuca and the whole group came, and Rein enjoyed seeing them. Baruh and Aleksa Čelebonović, who remained somewhat longer in Zagreb, visited him and they went together to Breyer's bookstore to look at books. Cuca was planning to come again. A card written to her five days later informs about art criticism of the exhibition appearing in Croatian papers, and Rein also mentions talking to art critic Zdenka Munk, who was favorably impressed by the Belgrade group.⁸⁶

Cuca did come on another visit that fall, but it seems that something happened which made Rein write an apologetic letter on 17 October 1940.⁸⁷ One of his letters written after her visit apparently hurt her and she did not save it.

Dear Cuca, I immediately want to tell you how thankful I am for your prudent and clever words. I beg you sincerely to forgive me and to forget my letter. I have days when some fever takes hold of me and then I do not understand either myself or the world, and so it happened that I wrote to you like this.

[How shocked am I] when I think that with my crazy words I almost destroyed our beautiful friendship, built through so many years that we went through—one can say—fire and water. I always highly appreciated our friendship, and now, like a thoughtless child, I almost destroyed it. Only thanks to your prudence it didn't come to that.... Only your letter allowed me to see what great unhappiness I was "en train de commettre" [in the process of committing].⁸⁸

The reason for his apology will remain private. The rest of the letter was once again devoted to the professional observations of an artist, reports on his progress, comments about her work, thoughts about the direction contemporary art should take, and admiration for his heroes: Gericault, Delacroix, David, and Bonnard.

se vratio iz Pariza slikar Ivan Rein, Moderna Galerija otkupila njegov rad Ženski portret," *Novosti*, 25 July 1940, noted by Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 54, 188.

86 Postcard, Zagreb, 17 Sept. 1940, SANU 14897/30: 1–2. It is possible that Rein knew Munk from Paris, where she studied museology at the École de Louvre in 1938.

87 In her interview with Milan Šarac on 1 Dec. 2004, for *Večernje Novosti Online*, Cuca mentioned being a very good friend of Ivan Rein and visiting him in his beautiful home in Zagreb.

88 Letter, Zagreb, 17 Oct. 1940, SANU, 14897/31.

Anyhow, I do know that we cannot—especially in these days—create masterpieces, but still it is better to break with the old, even if the price is creating canvases that are not successful, than continue in the old manner, even if it is successful. Not to succeed is sometimes more honorable than to succeed.⁸⁹

By the time Rein wrote this letter and tried to explain his earlier unfortunate words that almost cost him Cuca's friendship as a result of "a fever [that] takes hold of me and then I do not understand either myself or the world," the immediate world around him did begin, once again, to fall apart, becoming difficult to understand. After the capitulation of France in June 1940, Yugoslavia increasingly turned towards Nazi Germany hoping to gain from it protection rather than to end up under its occupation. This turn, as shown, made anti-Semitism official.⁹⁰ In Croatia, on 6 October 1940, the mainstream newspaper *Hrvatski dnevnik*, published in Zagreb, eagerly approved of the new anti-Jewish laws that presented the Jews as disloyal, and differentiated between them and the "local sons":

[The] Jewish element is considered a special group that has its own ideals, different from those of other citizens. The Jews had long wanted to form their own nation-state. Even today they consider Palestine their homeland.... As the Jewish element has not shown their homeland to be this country, it could not be entrusted with the care of supplying it under such delicate and difficult circumstances. Feeding the people is to be placed in the hands of those who will consider work of this kind a payment of their debt to their own homeland.⁹¹

When commenting about the *numerus clausus* the same paper wrote: "... After this decree, Croatian sons will no longer be left jobless, while their Jewish colleagues take positions in greater numbers than they merit."⁹²

The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia reacted to the new laws with a "Declaration" published in Zagreb's newspaper *Židov*:

89 Ibid.

90 About the anti-Jewish laws banning Jews from the food industry and introducing *numerus clausus* see above, Part II, 123.

91 Quoted in Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 79–80.

92 Ibid., 80.

One decree has prevented Jewish children, because they are Jewish, from attending secondary schools and universities. The other allows the authorities to exclude Jews from one branch of the economy, because they are Jews.... This humiliates and insults all the Jews in our country.... The Croatian and Serbian people have always treated us in the spirit of brotherhood and civil solidarity. Thus, we do not believe that these severe measures are in harmony with what the essential national character of this people has for centuries aspired to, because it, too, for many centuries suffered all the bitterness of slavery, violence and deprivation of rights.⁹³

Such expression of disappointment and tuned-down criticism did not help much. The situation in Zagreb grew worse. There were attempts to present the Jewish community's policy as being anti-Croat, supportive of the Belgrade regime, or as international, leftist, and nonintegrated into Croatian society, "accusations" easily applied to Rein. As the result of the oppressive atmosphere there was a sudden increase in conversions, mainly to Catholicism. The newly converted were strongly criticized both by the Jewish community and by non-Jews, something that may have affected Rein's family too.⁹⁴ Although Catholic, Rein's Jewish origin was always known, both through his surname and possibly also from his looks.

Several months elapsed between the last two letters written before the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia. The first, dated 11 November 1940, is concerned solely with professional matters—Cuca needed some paints she could not find in Belgrade and Rein unsuccessfully looked for them in Zagreb. He also mentions working on lithographs and complaining that his Zagreb colleagues, among them Croatian painter Oton Gliha, do not like them and think that he is a bad artist. "This is why I cannot wait to leave these surroundings," writes Rein. "In Paris you could close yourself off in a studio and not care about the rest of the world, while here some, if not all, are in possession of the 'painter's wisdom stone'.... I read the biographies of Delacroix and Gericault ... what wonderful times!"⁹⁵

The following letter bears the date 24 March 1941.⁹⁶ The next day, fearing invasion, Prince Paul signed the Tripartite Pact joining the Axis Powers. As noted above, the signing of the pact was the pretext two days later to initiate a military coup d'état that was followed by a rapid course of events ending in Hitler's

93 Ibid., 78.

94 Ibid., 59–60.

95 SANU, 14897/32.

96 SANU, 14897/33.

attack on Yugoslavia on the 6th of April.⁹⁷ Unaware of the rapid changes that were to occur in the next few days, after a longer break in correspondence, in this letter Rein revives his ties with Cuca and promises to write more often. He had hoped to see her again in Zagreb at Petar Lubarda's exhibition, but the show was postponed. He is working a lot and has begun to experiment with copper etchings, thrilled by the process of creating prints. There is an exhibition planned in Budapest to which Rein received an invitation, but the jury rejected both of the works he submitted. Rein blames this decision on his former teacher Becić, who, as he wrote ironically "cherishes a great 'love' against me" and "the general atmosphere—I don't have to explain it to you, you understand by yourself." Indeed, the non-Croat Rein was hardly a good choice to represent Croatian art in Horthy's pro-fascist Hungary.⁹⁸ But, he also mentions going to lectures given by Prof. Ljubo Babić, whom he respected from his studies at Zagreb's Art Academy. The course was about Spanish painting and he is enjoying Babić's original thinking and the reproductions shown at the lectures.

Throughout the letter Rein also mentions the names of a number of his Zagreb friends, also known to Cuca, which is further proof of his improved social situation. Among them is Koka Tomljenović, an especially interesting young woman artist whose contact with Rein throws additional light on his life, social ties, and professional and ideological choices. Ivana Tomljenović-Meller, better known by her nickname Koka (1906–1988), was the daughter of former Croatian governor [ban] and lawyer, Dr Tomislav Tomljenović. She grew up in affluence close to royal circles.⁹⁹ Known for her beauty, sports achievements, and social glamour since girlhood, in the 1920s she was a well-known society figure in Zagreb whose appearances at parties and social events was followed by the city press. Koka enrolled at Zagreb's Academy of Art in 1924, in the class of Prof. Ljubo Babić, and it is possible that Rein already met her then. Upon graduating she went first to Vienna, to the Kunstgewerbeschule, but left it and in 1929 moved to the Bauhaus in Dessau. Upon finishing there

97 See Part II, 130.

98 Hungary, supportive of and economically tied to Nazi Germany since 1938, joined the Axis powers in November 1940, under the government of Miklós Horthy.

99 After WWI, until 1921 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes maintained the independent status of the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Dr Tomljenović was its last governor [ban] for two brief periods between 1919 and 1921, before its absorption into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the future Yugoslavia. Ivana was one of the bridesmaids at the wedding of King Alexander and Marija, the daughter of Romanian King Ferdinand, the future Yugoslav queen; see *Jutarnji list*, December 9, 2012, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/razuzdani-zivot-ivane-tomljenovic-meller/1369959/> (last accessed 19 July 2019).

the obligatory preliminary course taught by Josef Albers, she studied photography and specialized in poster design and photo processing. Influenced by the Bauhaus' leftist intellectual atmosphere, she joined the German Communist Party. Though coming from upper class society, she now revolted against it, demanding social and economic equality. A Yugoslav communist group which organized an exhibition in Berlin under the title "Terror in Yugoslavia" commissioned Tomljenović to design the cover for a book on "Dictatorship in Yugoslavia."¹⁰⁰ In 1930 she left the Bauhaus in protest, together with a number of other students, in reaction to the dismissal of its director Hannes Meyer due to his being a communist. Koka continued to work as a stage and poster designer in Berlin until 1931 when she moved to Paris, where she studied literature at the Sorbonne, possibly again being in touch with Rein. The following year she moved to Prague and married Alfred Meller, an engineer and the owner of an advertising agency. They worked together creating novel luminokinetic shop window decorations for the company. Upon his death in 1935 she returned to Zagreb and later to Belgrade, where she taught poster design at women's colleges. In 1938 she once more moved back to Zagreb and worked as a teacher at a women's high school.¹⁰¹ Rein was probably very appreciative of her professional training, political outlook, and cosmopolitanism to which he could relate and feel comfortable with.

Unlike Rein's paintings, apparently some of Cuca's were accepted for the exhibition in Budapest and he is happy for her to be able to travel there. Not giving up, he informs her that he has already written to Belgrade's exhibition society and plans to send his work for the exhibition at the Cvijeta Zuzorić art pavilion, with a comment: "I hope that at least you [Belgrade, in contrast to Budapest] will not reject me." This would give him an opportunity to come once again to Belgrade, he writes, and talk with Cuca. He sends her his parent's regards and asks her to give his greetings to hers. These plans remained unfulfilled.

¹⁰⁰ The style of this photomontage, showing a photo of King Alexander in uniform, supporting himself by a sword while standing on top of a large corpse, against the red bloody background she used here, reveals the influence of the Bauhaus and the work of German leftist artists such as John Heartfield, who through his photomontages already in the 1920s began to point to the dangers of Nazism and Hitler.

¹⁰¹ Koka Tomljenović survived WWII and was employed after it in Zagreb as an art teacher. See Želimir Košćević and Ivana Tomljenović, *Ivana (Koka) Tomljenović: Bauhaus, Dessau, 1929–1930*, [catalogue] (Zagreb: Galerija grad Zagreb, Studio galerije suvremene umjetnosti, 1983); Leonida Kovač, "(Im)possible Photographs," in *Impossible Histories*, eds. Djurić and Šuvaković, 276–78.

The last letter preserved by Cuca was dated 14 October 1941 and written after the war had broken out in Yugoslavia. The letter was delivered to her by someone and not sent by regular post, as Rein had fled from Zagreb to the countryside, to the area of Gorski Kotar, which was under the control of the Italians.¹⁰²

Dear Cuca,

It is strange for me to write this name again after such a long time.

I am writing this letter in a hurry and sending it to you with a young lady that I have met here. She is so kind to take it with her. I don't know what is happening with you. Your aunt did not receive any news from you for a long time, and now I am not in Zagreb and I cannot ask her. Write to me please, if you receive this letter. Write to my parents. Write to me what is happening with other painters and our friends. What happened to your books, paintings, drawings? I safeguard your painting and your drawings like the apple of my eye. I cannot tell you how worried I am about you.

Otherwise I am alive and healthy—for now.

I work—because, here where I live, everything is beautiful, peaceful, and quiet, and we painters need to work, you know that yourself. When are we going to see each other again? God knows. What is most important is that you are alive and healthy. How are your mother, and father, your sister? Give them all my greetings, dear Cuca, don't forget anyone.

I hope this letter will reach your hands and that I will soon find out how things are with you. Stay alive and healthy.

Loves you very much and greets you cordially and collegially, your friend

Ivan¹⁰³

Rein's letter hints at the new and harsh reality that now surrounded them, seven months after their previous correspondence. He no longer lives in Zagreb, which became the capital of the newly founded Independent State of Croatia (NDH) ruled by the Ustasha. Instead, he lives in the countryside, hiding (he never really mentions his whereabouts in the letter), since it was too dangerous for him to remain in Zagreb because of his leftist worldviews and Jewish origin. Cuca's silence, about which he is worried, was imposed due to the rupture the bombing of Belgrade and its invasion by German troops caused in her life: she and her family were thrown out of the building that housed her

¹⁰² Ambruš, *Ivan Rein*, 186.

¹⁰³ Letter, 14 Oct. 1941, SANU, 14897/34.

father's newspaper *Pravda* which was closed down, and her father died in the course of the year. Nevertheless, Rein's main concern, aside from their wellbeing, is stubbornly connected to their work as artists: "I work—because, here where I live, everything is beautiful, peaceful, and quiet, and we painters need to work, you know that yourself." Now, more than ever, Rein expressed with those words his firm belief that the continuous creation of art is a form of fighting. It is, and will continue to be, his main way of resistance.

Although much of Rein's work was lost, the preserved letters he wrote to his friend, the Belgrade artist Ljubica Cuca Sokić, offer a unique source for understanding the period they lived through, just before and during the first years of WWI in Europe, before its eruption in Yugoslavia. Rein's thoughts about art, his descriptions of his works, sketches he added to his letters and his comments about the artistic scene in Paris and Yugoslavia offer a most valuable insight into this tense period. Moreover, his letters paint a portrait of the political situation, viewed from his position as a non-Aryan "other," and also as a leftist. The sensitive rendering of his psychological state of despair, deep sense of insecurity, and at the same time strength and readiness to fight back by continuously working and creating, help us to understand him as a person. Much of his creativity and originality would accompany him, as we will see later, during WWII, when he as a refugee and camp inmate stubbornly stuck to his vocation as an artist.

In contrast to Rein's cosmopolitanism, Daniel Ozmo, a young Sarajevan Sephardic artist, and the subject of the following chapter, was much more rooted in the Jewish experience. But, like Bora Baruh, his connection with the political left led to the creation of radical, socially-aware avant-garde art.